is possible, Insole argues, then there could be truths that are unknowable, and therefore truth is not epistemically constrained (64).

To see why this argument does not work, it is worth briefly considering the position that is being criticized. A recent example of an epistemically constrained account of truth has been proposed by Crispin Wright. He contends that truth can be analysed as *super-assertibility*. A sentence is super-assertible if it is warranted given our current information, and will remain warranted under any further accumulation or other improvements of our information, and arbitrarily close scrutiny. (Wright, it should be noted, claims only that super-assertibility provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept of truth – he is not saying that truth, in all fields of discourse, is nothing more than super-assertibility.) Does Insole establish that there could be truths that are not super-assertible? All his argument posits is that there could be sentences that we do not (and may never) know to be true, but that would be known to be true were we as well informed as the higher beings and our powers of scrutiny increased. So these claims are super-assertible. Insole's argument appears to conflate the anti-realist theory that all truths are *in principle* knowable, with the claim that no (clearly thinking!) anti-realist should make, that all truths are knowable to us.

In the second half of the book, Insole moves away from semantic realism/anti-realism to metaphysical issues such as Goodman's theories about world-making, and Kant's transcendental idealism. The fairly sympathetic treatment of Gordon Kaufman is notable. Later parts of the book review more theological literature and its Kantian influences, notably work by Paul Janz and James K. A. Smith. In the concluding sections, Insole looks at whether talk of God should be construed analogically (though he does not take up the debate about whether it should be taken metaphorically).

In all, Insole offers a review of relevant literature, and numerous arguments (of varying success) against religious anti-realism. He leaves us rather less clear on what his positive realist theory would involve.

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Brian Davies *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*. (London: Continuum, 2006). Pp. 264. £16.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0 8264 9241 X.

Brian Davies argues that 'much that has recently been written on God and evil … should be viewed as either beside the point, just plain wrong, or even morally dubious' (3). But, he claims, we cannot assess responses to the

problem of evil unless we first consider questions about the existence and nature of God.

Thus, in chapter 2 of this book he appeals to a version of the cosmological argument to support belief in God. He argues that, if the existence of something is not part of its nature it requires an external cause, and that, 'if the existence of nothing in the universe is accountable for in terms of its nature, the existence of the universe as a whole (and at any time) requires an external (agent-) cause' (41). He considers five objections, his responses to which are largely a variation upon his response to the first – i.e. '[I]t seems obvious to me, if every object in the universe needs something other than itself to account for its existence, the universe as a whole does so as well' (45).

For Davies, the word 'God' describes that which produces and sustains the universe. But what else, if anything, can we say about such a God? In chapter 3 he makes five claims about what God is not: God is not a body; God is not distinguishable from His nature (i.e. He is not one of a kind); there is no distinction between God's essence and His existence (i.e. existence belongs to God by nature); God undergoes only Cambridge (relational) changes; and God cannot intervene in His creation because He is already present within it. Davies concludes that God is not like anything we know and that it therefore makes sense to regard Him as incomprehensible (78). He claims that it is misguided to attempt to think about the problem of evil while assuming that we understand what God is – particularly if we think that God is a moral agent.

In chapter 4, Davies argues that God is not a moral agent on two grounds. Taking these in reverse order (the two arguments are interrelated and therefore not clearly delineated), the second is that there is little biblical support for the idea of a God who is morally good. The notion of God's goodness appears mainly in the Psalms, where it mostly means that God is faithful to the terms of His covenant with Israel. God is described as good only twice in the New Testament (Mark 10.18 and Luke 18.19); he is more frequently said to be holy, righteous, just, faithful, merciful or loving, but these terms do not commend God for conforming to moral standards (101). Old Testament writers 'sometimes ask how *some* pain and suffering can be inflicted by a God who … has promised *some* people certain goods on condition that they act in accordance with his decrees' (97), but the existence of pain and suffering never leads to a general moral defence or attack on God. It is not the case that the biblical God treats everyone as equals; He elects some and wreaks havoc on others without providing a defence. Davies cites, amongst others, the story of Jacob and Esau, whose fates were settled before they were born, and of whom God says 'I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau' (Romans 9.11, 13) (96).

Davies's first argument for the view that God is not a moral agent is that, if God creates and sustains the universe, He is not an existent amongst others and therefore cannot be expected to conform to moral standards external to Himself.

This does not mean that 'God can determine by fiat whether or not it is right to torture children' (102), however. Aquinas's answer to the Euthyphro dilemma is to say that God wills us to do what is good because it is good, and what is good depends on the way God made creatures to be (*ibid.*). Thus, God could not require us to torture children because this would contradict His nature as the source of goodness (102–103).

Some would, however, argue that the Bible contains a developing understanding of the nature of God, and that the biblical writers who thought that God favours some and allows others to suffer had misunderstood the nature of the divine. In appealing to biblical texts which describe such a God, Davies solves the problem of evil only at the price of appearing to support belief in God as a tyrannical despot. His appeal to such an apparently anthropomorphic deity seems surprising, however, given his insistence that God is not like human creatures. His other argument is less problematic. If we think of God as whatever is responsible for bringing the universe into existence and sustaining it, there is no implication that this force must create an environment which is free of suffering.

But if we want to go on defending the idea that God is a moral agent, can we do so cogently? In chapters 5 and 6 Davies considers a range of theodicies, most of which were first outlined in chapter 1. The free-will defence, and arguments which claim that non-moral evil is necessary for the existence of certain goods (most notably those of Richard Swinburne and John Hick), are considered in chapter 5. Davies claims that we would not value people less if freedom were an illusion; we merely assume that a person with freedom is superior. This seems to miss the point, however; such a person may or may not be superior to a person who cannot choose, but, it might be argued, a world in which persons are able to make free choices might be superior to one in which no choice is possible. A person who is able to make free choices is responsible for his/her actions, and this allows the possibility both of moral growth and of an appropriate recompense for one's actions. Allegedly, it also absolves God of responsibility for bad human choices.

But Davies also objects to the free-will defence because it assumes that freedom exists independently of God's causal action. He argues that, if God is responsible for bringing into existence and sustaining everything which is not Himself, the course of action which a person chooses is, in some sense, caused by God. For Davies, the word 'cause' may have different, although sometimes related, meanings (126) and divine causation is different from the causation of created things. Thus, God does not cause a person to act in a certain way, but He does cause the freely acting person to be. This fails to avoid the difficulty however; there remains a kind of cause for which God is not responsible and, in allowing this, God leaves Himself and the universe at the mercy of the actions we choose.

Davies also dismisses the arguments of Swinburne and Hick. He objects that, even if we assume that God is a moral agent whose actions require explanation, it is debatable whether God would be justified in creating a world in which good only sometimes comes from evil. According to Davies, Hick thinks that God sets up 'a cosmic obstacle course which benefits some and destroys others' (134), thereby apparently excusing God for behaviour which would be inexcusable in human beings.

In chapter 6, Davies considers seven alternative approaches: (1) A world containing evil is better than a world without evil; the existence of evil contributes, in some way, towards the good of the whole. (2) Evil is unreal – it is either an illusion, or an absence or privation of a good. (3) Evil is justly inflicted punishment. (4) There might be a moral justification for the existence of evil of which we are ignorant – the 'we can't see all the picture' argument. (5) Human unhappiness is no reason to criticize God. (6) This is the best possible world. (7) God also suffers. For reasons which space does not permit me to indicate, all of these arguments are rejected – except the view that evil is an absence or privation of a good, and this Davies considers further in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 distinguishes between evil suffered and evil done. Evil suffered occurs when existing things fail to be as good as they could be; it is not an existent entity. Thus it cannot be caused by God, who is 'the cause of the being of all that is real apart from himself' (177). Secondly, there can be no evil suffered without a concomitant good; Davies suggests that he cannot be a human being with toothache if he is not a human being, and that, although it may be bad for a lamb to be eaten by a lion, it is good for the lion. But, while it might be better to be a human being with toothache than not to be a human being at all, there might be some kinds of evil suffered which render non-existence the preferable alternative. And an omnipotent God could, presumably, have created a herbivorous lion – unless, of course, it is unreasonable to expect God to behave in a manner analogous to that of a moral agent.

Davies's explanation for evil done is in part parallel to his explanation of evil suffered – i.e. it represents a failure of action and therefore does not exist – and in part repeats an objection to the free-will defence from chapter 5 – i.e. God causes our being, but we are responsible for our choices. If the first of these arguments were to succeed, there would be no need for the second which, as I have already suggested, fails to address the problem. The argument relies on there being a sense in which evil does not exist but, as Davies says when dismissing the argument that evil is an illusion, if it seems to me that I am miserable then I am, indeed, miserable (143). Similarly, even if we say that your shooting me is a failure of your action – presumably a failure to prevent yourself from pulling the trigger – if it seems to me that I am in agony as a consequence of your action, then that is, indeed, the case.

In chapter 8, Davies argues that God is good in two senses. First, picking up on a point made at the end of chapter 4 (103), he argues that God is as good as it is possible for God to be. A perfect human being would be perfectly moral, but a perfect God is wholly actual; a God who lacked actuality would be an imperfect God. This seems to imply a rather weak sense of 'good'; it amounts to little more than the claim that a good God is an existing God. If this is, indeed, all that God's goodness entails, the problem of evil vanishes, but the concept of God is significantly diminished. Davies's second sense in which God is good is, perhaps, more promising. In this sense, God is good in that the goodness of created things is reflected in the essence of their creator.

In the final chapter, Davies returns again to his argument of chapter 2. If, as he argues there, we need God to account for the existence of the world, nothing, including evil, can count against His existence. This he refers to as the 'we know that God exists' line of thinking. In chapter 7, he argued that God loves in the sense that He wills the good for others. Here, building on his 'biblical' argument of chapter 4, he admits that he has not given

> … any reason to suppose that God loves everything equally, for, in so far as love towards a creature can be ascribed to God on the basis of goodness effected in the creature by God, it seems obvious that God does not love all creatures equally. Some have more goodness than others (224).

In other words, some creatures display – or perhaps experience – less goodness than others because they are loved less by God. This seems an extraordinary claim for a theist to make. Davies attempts to soften the blow by suggesting that 'what we take to be bad can and does sometimes lead to what is good' (238) but, as he acknowledges, this cannot constitute the theodicy which he has already rejected in an earlier chapter. He also suggests that God has compassion for His creatures in the sense that He is not distant from whatever happens to them (234). This is developed in the final section of this final chapter, in which he argues that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity gives us reason to think of God as loving because, if God the Son suffered and died as a human being, evil does not render God's existence impossible; 'evil is something in which God is truly involved as its victim, as something with respect to which he is not *other than us* but *one of us*' (243). It is, however, questionable whether Davies here falls prey to some of his own objections to the 'suffering God' argument of chapter 6. For example, he argues there that, in the light of his earlier arguments about the nature of God, 'there can be no question of God literally suffering' (166), and that '[s]haring in actual pain is neither necessary nor sufficient for compassion' (167).

Thus, Davies solves the problem of evil, but, in so doing, constructs a concept of a God who is good in only the most limited of senses. Evil may be non-existent in one rather contrived sense, but the suffering to which it gives rise is not an

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illusion. A God who is good only in the sense that He exists as the source of the goodness, which He wills for only some of His creatures and only some of the time, would seem to be more of a hindrance than a help to those who are struggling with the problem of evil.

Nevertheless, this book provides a readable exposition and assessment of a range of theodicies, and makes a valuable contribution to debate about one of the less common responses to the problem of evil. It would therefore be of interest both to undergraduates and to those with a postgraduate interest in questions about the coherence of theism.

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