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Stump's theodicy of redemptive suffering and Molinism

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Abstract. Eleonore Stump develops and defends a theodicy of redemptive suffering. In particular, God's permission of suffering (at least some classes, if not instances, of serious undeserved, involuntary suffering due to natural or free causes) is justified just in case it benefits those who suffer, it is the best possible means in the circumstances for their benefit, and God knows this is the case. The main aim of this paper is to show that for Stump's theodicy to have a good chance of working, it is reasonable to think that it requires the Molinist claim that God has middle knowledge.

I

Eleonore Stump develops and defends a theodicy for serious undeserved involuntary suffering.[1] God's ultimate end for free creatures is union with him in heaven. God uses suffering for our redemption. In particular, God's permission of suffering is justified just in case it benefits those who suffer, it is the best possible means in the circumstances for their benefit, and God knows that this is the case. I will assume for the sake of argument that these are necessary conditions for God's permission of moral and natural evil and the suffering which results from it. The chief target of my critique will be another aspect of Stump's theodicy. Though she eschews reliance on middle knowledge, I will show that for her response to the problem of evil to be plausible it requires that God has middle knowledge.[2]

Stump's theodicy is complex and sophisticated. It draws on important insights associated with other theodicies, but attempts to get past their alleged shortcomings. She does this in large part by appealing to some distinctively Christian claims, thus paving the way, she thinks, to a successful Christian solution to the problem of evil.

Stump incorporates some elements of soul-making theodicy. She admits that moral virtues may be one of the kinds of good produced by evil. Some evil may thus be absorbed; i.e., it is logically necessary for and actually does

[1] See in particular 'The problem of evil', *Faith and Philosophy*, **2** (1985), 392–423, and 'Providence and the problem of evil' in Thomas P. Flint (ed.) *Christian Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 51–91. In subsequent references in the text and notes, I will abbreviate these as PE and PPE, respectively.

[2] Stump denies this, though not so far as I am aware in print. She clearly tries to distance herself from middle knowledge in PPE (see note 53 in particular), though she never says it explicitly.

produce an outweighing good.[3] However, like some others, Stump does not think that accounts such as John Hick's establish a logically necessary connection between really serious moral or natural evil and character building. Not all evil is absorbed, or at least not for the reasons Hick gives. On Stump's diagnosis, the remedy lies in a different conception of character-building and the role evil plays in it (PE 396–397 and 416).[4]

Free Will Theodicy, if it works, can account for the existence of unabsorbed moral evil. If all apparently natural evil is in fact a species of broadly moral evil – due to the free actions of Satan and his cohorts or the cosmic consequence of past human wrongdoing – it is subsumable under Free Will Theodicy. If, on the other hand, there is genuine unabsorbed natural evil, some version of Natural Law Theodicy, if it works, can account for its existence. But Stump does not think that these theodicies really work.

She thinks that a Free Will Theodicy which draws on Plantinga's ideas leaves unjustified the successful acting on an evil free will (PE 394 and 416). It does not adequately explain why God could not prevent moral evil and its harmful consequences while preserving creaturely freedom, e.g., by withholding the freedom of perpetrators whenever God knew that they would or would probably go wrong, or by allowing perpetrators the freedom to misbehave in a playpen, thus making all their evil free decisions victimless. Choice of breakfast cereal may be insignificant. But why must significant choices be between good and evil, much less between momentous good and evil? It would seem that God could, e.g., restrict our freedom to choices between incommensurable goods, and thereby prevent evil. Such freedom must not be significant enough, but we appear to be given no explanation why.

Stump thinks that Swinburne's account fares better here. The unimpeded exercise of our freedom between momentous good and evil gives us great responsibility and a choice of destiny. In giving us the ability to make decisions which affect the well-being of ourselves and others, it seems that God has given us a share of the power that would otherwise have belonged exclusively to Him. If God restricted our choices in such a way as to prevent any serious evil or if God always intervened to prevent its harmful consequences, Stump agrees with Swinburne that we would be more like pets than persons (PE 395 and 417). While she agrees that the significant exercise of our freedom is *a* good which could only be produced by God's allowing evil, her main complaint against Swinburne is that his account fails to justify God's permission of natural evil (PE 396 and 416). Natural evil is not required for our significant freedom; and while knowledge of the conse-

[3] The notion of absorbed evil is J. L. Mackie's. See his *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 154.

[4] I will not attempt to adjudicate Stump's criticisms of Hick and others in this section.

quences of our actions is necessary for significant freedom, neither that knowledge nor its value require natural evil.[5]

Stump incorporates elements of Free Will Theodicy insofar as she too places great value on our significant freedom. However, her account of its main value differs from that suggested by others. In a Plantinga-style theodicy, it is our use of significant freedom to produce moral goodness, and in particular more moral good overall than evil, which is so valuable as to outweigh the disvalue of the evil which is its side effect. For Swinburne the main value is its use in a choice of destiny, i.e. over what kind of creatures we become and what sort of universe we live in. For Hick the main value is its use in soul making, understood as an evolution from an immature though good state to a better one. For Stump, however, the outweighing good which significant freedom produces is willing in accordance with God's will, and thus making union with Him possible. Though this good may include the value of morally good choices, it does not seem to be a species of moral goodness, but apparently subsumes whatever value moral goodness may have. Put another way, moral goodness may be one good, but it is not the only or even the most important good there is. Union with God in heaven is the most important good, and the exercise of significant freedom is a necessary condition for this good. Swinburne seems to have been on the right track in speaking of the importance of a 'choice of destiny', but he did not take this notion far enough. Hick may have come closer to the truth here, but falls short in his conception of humans. For Stump, it is the unimpeded exercise of our significant freedom in co-operation with the cure of our defective will, due to the Fall, which outweighs and justifies all the evil in the world (PE 416–417).

Following tradition, Stump maintains that natural evil entered the world with the Fall. Since the Fall, humans have been born with a strong inclination to certain sorts of evil. If left uncorrected, the defect in post-Fall humanity would result in permanent separation from God. God cannot unilaterally change our will if we are to retain our freedom, and we cannot fix the defect in our will by ourselves. We need God's help. Humility, unhappiness with our present state, and a desire for a better one are among the necessary conditions for changing our defective will. That which contributes to the satisfaction of these conditions contributes to our willing God's help. In Stump's view, serious suffering caused by moral and natural evil can make such a contribution. In fact, we could not even begin to will God's help without it. If God always intervened to prevent moral and natural evil and its consequences, we would all be eternally damned (PE 406ff).

It is not entirely clear from Stump's texts whether she thinks that all instances of suffering are logically necessary means for our redemption or

[5] Also see Stump's 'Knowledge, freedom and the problem of evil', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, **14** (1983), especially 52–57.

whether just some is logically necessary. In fact, it is not even clear whether or in what sense she thinks that any suffering is necessary. On her account, pre-Fall humanity could and presumably did always will in accordance with God's will. In that sense at least, moral and natural evil is not logically necessary in a world containing significantly free creatures. But the situation seems radically different for post-Fall humanity. Given our post-Fall state, it would appear that at least *some* evil is a logically necessary means for our redemption, for without any suffering, she says that we would all be damned. However, at times it does not appear that *all* evil is a logically necessary means for our redemption. For example, she often speaks of suffering being the best *available* means, or the only or most *effective* means, in the circumstances of drawing a sufferer closer to God (PE 409; PPE 53, 66, and 72). This suggests that suffering might on occasion be only a causally or instrumentally necessary means. In addition, that every or any particular instance of suffering may not be logically or causally necessary is suggested by passages such as the following: 'I am not trying to say here that the suffering which a child or any other person experiences is the only way in which that person could be brought to God' (PE 411). Elsewhere she says, 'It is not compatible with Mordecai's principle to claim that the evil God permits is a necessary means to the good which justifies it since on Mordecai's principle God might have achieved his purpose in some way other than that brought about by a particular person's evil' (PPE 75).

Despite these apparent ambiguities or tensions, I think Stump really wants and needs to maintain that every particular instance of suffering is a logically necessary means for our redemption. As we have seen, her common complaint against others is precisely that they fail to establish a logically necessary connection between the evils that actually occur and the good that justifies God's permission of them. In addition, we are told that we might reasonably expect a perfectly good God to prevent in some way that *particular suffering* of any person which is not outweighed by the good which it produces *for that person* (PE 411). If the good in question here is an *inclination* to will God's help in the long-term if not immediately, then I think Stump denies that there is any unabsorbed evil in the world. If, on the other hand, the good in question is our *actually* willing God's help, then Stump admits that there is unabsorbed evil. If we are significantly free, there can be no logical guarantee that we will accept God's help. I think it is for this reason that she sometimes speaks of evil as being the 'best available' or 'only or most effective' means for our spiritual benefit. We should not be misled into thinking that by such phrases she means that evil might only be causally or instrumentally necessary. If it were not a logically necessary means for our redemption, God would be expected to prevent its occurrence.

Stump's theodicy is a member of the family of greater-good theodicies insofar as it focuses on a single good which is allegedly so valuable as to

outweigh and justify all the evil in the world. But there are some important features of her account which distinguish it from most other greater-good theodicies. Whereas others typically focus on God's omnipotence and the logical constraints imposed on it if God decides to create beings with significant libertarian freedom, Stump's focus is on God's perfect goodness. The point is not that power or sovereignty is an unimportant element of God's providential governance. Rather, we must not overlook the importance of preserving God's goodness and love in trying to find a satisfying explanation for His permission of the evils that actually occur. In addition, other greater-good theodicies typically speak only of God's 'general strategies' for trying to get some good for humanity or the world at large, irrespective of its effect on the lives of those who suffer for its sake. Such theodicies look insensitive, if not inhuman. A God who permits the horrors allegedly justified by these theodicies looks downright callous or perverse. Fear, not deep trust and love, would appear to be the most appropriate attitude toward such a being. What is distinctive about Stump's theodicy is the attempt to incorporate traditional Christian claims and values into an explanation for why God permits certain 'hard' cases, such as the suffering of children.[6]

More importantly, it seems to be the case that every instance of serious suffering must be a benefit to those who suffer; it must be the best possible means in the circumstances for that benefit; and God must know this. Though she concedes that it is possible that God permits evil for the sake of some abstract general or global good for humanity, she says she wants to avoid such a theodicy. Since the highest good is union with God, the particular suffering of any person is justified only if it brings that person closer to that good in a way she could not have been without the suffering (PE 411).

It is this strong claim or requirement in particular which appears to impose the heaviest burden on her theodicy. It is also the one which strongly suggests her need to endorse the Molinist notion of middle knowledge.[7] William Hasker once thought that Stump's account required middle knowledge, if not something even stronger. He said:

[6] Stump has not been alone in shifting the spotlight to God's goodness, especially in connection with really serious evil. Marilyn McCord Adams offers an account of redemptive suffering, though she really eschews theodicy in the usual sense(s) of the term. For her, intimacy or union with Christ ultimately compensates or defeats, rather than justifies, horrendous evil; insofar as there is a logical connection between temporal suffering and a vision of the inner life of God, the relation is apparently one of identity, not one of logically necessary means. See, e.g., her 'Theodicy without blame', *Philosophical Topics*, **16** (1988), 215–245, and 'Redemptive suffering: a Christian solution to the problem of evil' in Michael L. Peterson (ed.) *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 169–187.

[7] Middle knowledge has an intermediate conceptual status; it stands between God's so-called natural and free knowledge. The truths God knows by His natural knowledge are necessary and independent of His will; the truths God knows by His free knowledge are contingent and dependent on His will; the truths God knows by His middle knowledge are contingent but independent of His will. Among the

It is evident at once that for the theodicy to work there must be a very high degree of planning and coordination on God's part so as to insure that all of the apparently random events in the world's history work together to achieve his goal … . And this, in turn, requires a high level of *control* over the course of events on God's part … . [O]ne would think that for her scheme to work God must have *at least* as much control as would be afforded by middle knowledge.[8]

But more recently, Hasker claims that this was mistaken. He says:

The benefits which, according to Stump's theodicy, result from suffering are chiefly of a moral and spiritual sort; insofar as special divine action is required, this would consist mainly of gracious influences on the soul of the sufferer, and does not require a high degree of co-ordination of external events.[9]

Let us consider three important questions. (1) Does Stump's theodicy require a high degree of co-ordination by God of external events, which at least on the face of it would require the sort of control afforded by middle knowledge? (2) If her theodicy does not in fact require a high degree of co-ordination by God of external events, wouldn't God still need middle knowledge to plumb the depths of the souls of sufferers and perpetrators of evil to put them in a position to benefit from their suffering and evil-doing? (3) If Stump can plausibly resist the need for middle knowledge in individual cases, could God's overall use of evil for redemption be guaranteed to succeed without middle knowledge?

II

God's need for middle knowledge may not be so pressing prior to the Fall.[10] But that might depend in part on what conditions were like, i.e. on details. According to Stump, the Christian belief that natural evil entered the world as a result of the Fall is ambiguous. It could be read either as the claim that no person *suffered* from diseases, tornadoes, droughts, etc. until the Fall or as the claim that there were *no* diseases, etc. in the world until the Fall (PE 405).

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objects of God's middle knowledge are so-called counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. These conditionals typically state what any creature God might create would do if placed in any possible complete situation in which that creature had occasion to act freely. God's middle knowledge also includes knowledge of what would result from every possible combination or arrangement of natural indeterministic causes.

[8] *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 201.

[9] 'The necessity of gratuitous evil', *Faith and Philosophy*, **9** (1992), 41–42. He adds that he is happy to be able to report that Stump agrees with him that there is no middle knowledge and that God is a risk-taker.

[10] The priority in question here is to be understood as logical or conceptual, not temporal. So far as I can tell, my case for Stump's need to endorse middle knowledge does not presuppose that God is in time and so literally *foreknows* our free actions and their results. Stump of course denies this. Though Molinists have always affirmed God's complete foreknowledge, so far as I can tell it does no real work for them. What does the work is God's middle knowledge and His knowledge of the total contribution He wills to make to the world. What I am suggesting then is that Stump could and should conjoin middle knowledge to her view of God's atemporal eternity.

The truth of the former would appear to require a fair amount of co-ordination by God of external circumstances and events. This would seem even more pronounced if we are not just talking about Adam and Eve, but a large group of people. Stump herself wishes to remain neutral over whether the Fall was the result of a single dateable event by the free actions of a particular person or the product of many human actions over a long period of time.[11] Either way, pre-Fall humanity would have to be placed in circumstances which were such that no actual harm to them would result from these phenomena. Stump assures us that the ways in which an omnipotent God might have ensured this are limited only by one's imagination (PE 405). So it is difficult to say that middle knowledge would have been required, though it would certainly have been useful.

The stronger reading of the claim, i.e. that there were no diseases, tornadoes, droughts, etc. in the world until the Fall, would appear to require very careful planning and co-ordination, and hence control over, external events. It is hard to see how this could have been achieved without middle knowledge. However, this seems to assume that there was indeterminism in nature before the Fall. Stump may want to deny this. Perhaps the entire natural world was strictly deterministic. Perhaps the laws of nature were set up in such a way that there would be no diseases, etc. unless free creatures sinned. If the Fall had cosmic consequences, one of them might have been the introduction of indeterminism in nature. If so, it seems that God would not have needed middle knowledge prior to the Fall.

Leaving these matters aside, Stump could argue that middle knowledge is not needed prior to the Fall in the following way. Without middle knowledge, God must take some risk if He is to create beings with libertarian freedom. The apparent alternative is not to create any free creatures or else not leave them significantly free. While such worlds would have been open to God, they would have been lacking in significant freedom, and so by hypothesis would not have been among the most valuable worlds God could have actualized. We must suppose that God values significant freedom and the good(s) it makes possible. Just how much God values it may be an open question, though Stump certainly wants to say that God places enormous value on it. She says that Christians must say this 'because the evil of Adam's fall and all subsequent moral and natural evil could have been prevented if human beings had never been given free will in the first place' (PE 416). It is arguable that risky behaviour for the chance of a small gain is morally objectionable. The more one is prepared to weaken, if not sever, a logical connection between the goodness of a world and significant freedom, the harder it is to get past the reckless risk-taking objection. If there is necessarily some risk for God if He creates significantly free creatures, He would presumably go with the least risky creative option.

[11] See her 'Suffering for redemption: a reply to Smith', *Faith and Philosophy*, **2** (1985), 432.

To avoid the charge of reckless risk-taking, God was presumably guided by His knowledge of probabilities, i.e. would-probably conditionals. God could have known that if He set up initial conditions in the way He actually did in the garden, Adam and Eve would probably never sin. And so God could also have known that there would probably be no natural evil either, if natural evil would enter the world only as a result of sin. Without any true counterfactuals of freedom, there would be no guarantee for God that they would not sin. There would be a chance, though perhaps very slim, that they would go wrong at least once sometime. On the basis of this knowledge, God actualized the creative option He did. But sad to say, Adam and Eve did what it was most likely, virtually certain, that they would not do. They sinned. That sin corrupted human nature and has had dramatic and inheritable consequences ever since; and by that sin natural evil also entered the world. How can we fault God for going with the creative option which had the likely best result or near enough, or which had the least chance of loss? Other creative options might have had a much lower probability of success, or a much higher probability of disappointment. God might have been unlucky in the sense that His best attempt to actualize a world in which creatures always willed in accordance with His will failed.

Without middle knowledge, God could also have known that if Adam and Eve did sin, He could probably bring more good out of this via the Incarnation and Redemption. He may have known a counterfactual of divine freedom, e.g., if Adam and Eve were to sin, I would send my only Son into the world. Counterfactuals of divine freedom are not supposed to be within the scope of God's middle knowledge, for their truth-values are hardly independent of God's will.[12] So it would seem that God could have known this conditional without middle knowledge.

Given this knowledge, God might even have known that if He chose the creative option He actually did, Adam and Eve would probably sin, and so have known that natural evil would probably enter the world. It would seem even more plausible to say this in the case that the Fall was the product of many free actions over a long period of time. If creatures did sin, God could also have known that it would be within His power so to respond that there would probably be more good overall than evil via the Incarnation and Redemption. Whether or not He knew that they would probably sin, He might also have known that if He had arranged things differently, the overall result would probably have been worse.

Nothing in this pre-Fall story seems to require middle knowledge, though it is certainly compatible with it. If risk-taking is incompatible with perfect goodness, it is reasonable to think that middle knowledge is required. One

[12] This is so at least for orthodox Molinists. See Thomas P. Flint *Divine Providence*: *The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 55–71. However, this comes with an important qualification. See section IV below.

of the main dangers of eschewing middle knowledge and claiming that God's actions contribute to the overall goodness of a world no matter how creatures might freely misbehave is that it makes the risk-taking objection look decisive. Why take a gamble on significant creaturely freedom if the goodness of a world can be made to depend directly on what *God* does?

III

This is hardly the end of the story for Stump. It is unclear that it would even be a welcome beginning. Viewing pre-Fall humanity apart from or independently of post-Fall humanity is rather forced and crude. For Stump, it is not as if God does not know Adam's sin; all actual temporal events are present to eternal God.[13] In addition, eschewing middle knowledge and endorsing the account sketched above seem to let God off the hook for evil too easily. It suggests that regardless of how bad this world actually is, God tried His best; it is our fault, not God's, if the actual world is not the world which was most likely to result from God's creative activity. This alone, I think, should raise some serious suspicions. The problem of evil is not that easy to solve. If it were, the bulk of Stump's theodicy would be superfluous.

One of the chief dangers for Stump is that the above anti-Molinist account seems to fit more easily into an abstract general good theodicy. As it stands it fails to make the right sort of connection between an individual's suffering and the greater good. It hardly begins to exhibit God's providential care and love for creatures. As I pointed out earlier, Stump tells us that she wants to avoid an abstract general good theodicy. Any greater-good theodicy which emphasizes the value of significant freedom would seem to require at a minimum God's knowledge that there would be more moral good overall than evil as a result, for significant freedom would not be so valuable regardless of how creatures used it, and God could have prevented all evil just by not giving creatures significant freedom. At the least, this is certainly what a Plantinga-style Free Will Theodicy requires. It is hard, if not impossible, to see how God could have known this without middle knowledge.[14] Stump's greater-good theodicy, if successful, would seem to require at a minimum God's knowledge that more creatures would freely will in accordance with His will and end up in heaven. If more creatures would freely reject God's help and end up in hell, that would seem to count as a failure of God's use of suffering for redemption. But it is hard, if not impossible, to see how God could have known that His plan would not fail without middle knowledge. If Stump is willing to abandon this global failure condition, then

[13] See Stump and Kretzmann 'Eternity', *Journal of Philosophy*, **78** (1981), 429–458.

[14] For more details and defence of this, see my 'Free will defence with and without Molinism', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, **43** (1998), especially 50–54.

I think her account collapses into precisely the sort of abstract general good theodicy she says she wants to avoid, and the charge that God was reckless looks decisive. I will return to this important issue in section V.

For now, I think it is important to note that even if God could have known that His redemptive plan would succeed overall without middle knowledge, this would not seem to be enough for Stump. The details of her theodicy require a necessary connection between individual instances of suffering and the possibility of union with God. God is justified in permitting the serious undeserved involuntary suffering of any person only if it is a necessary means to that person's benefit. In the next section I will give reasons for thinking that the need for middle knowledge comes more prominently into the picture here.

IV

On the face of it, one would think that Stump needs to endorse God's middle knowledge. According to her, 'God as parent creator has a right to, and a responsibility for, painful correction of his creatures' (PE 413). Suffering is necessary for the possibility of our salvation. To be fair, presumably everyone must have a shot at the benefit suffering makes possible. God must plumb the depths of every soul, knowing what kinds, instances, amount, intensity, and duration of suffering, along with the right supernatural aids, would produce the best result for each creature. To know this, it would seem that God would have to know how we would respond to the suffering and aids in question, as well as to other kinds, instances, etc. of each. He would have to know in which complete circumstances we would and would not freely turn to him.

God has to be sure that the suffering of each person is not of such a kind, intensity, amount or duration that it overwhelms the sufferer. Much of the evil that occurs affects more than a single person, and people can react very differently to the same instance of evil. One person may benefit spiritually from it, while another would be overwhelmed. If the harm inflicted would not be a benefit to a particular sufferer, we might reasonably expect that it would be prevented in some way by God. In some cases this might mean that God has to prevent the evil in question and as a result forego its benefit for someone else. But then another instance of suffering in which that person would respond favourably and no-one else is overwhelmed will be needed.

Of course God may often be able to permit the evil in question but prevent any person from being overwhelmed simply by granting the right supernatural aids. If people can react differently to the same instance of evil, it is surely open to God to act in different ways on the psyche of each person affected. For some people, God's suggesting a certain thought may be sufficient to prevent them from being overwhelmed by their suffering. For others, God may need to manifest himself in a powerful religious experience. By inter-

acting in the right way with each person's psyche as the suffering is ongoing, God may be able to control their suffering without the need to control circumstances external to them.

One might argue that this in fact undermines my case for Stump's need to endorse middle knowledge. If the above is right, 'advance' planning and control via middle knowledge might seem unnecessary. After all, did I not recognize earlier that God does not need middle knowledge to know how He is going to act or would act on the psyche of those who might suffer?[15]

I do not think this shows that middle knowledge is dispensable. I agree that by acting directly on an individual's psyche God may not need control over external circumstances to control suffering. But this will work only if it is true that the individual would not be overwhelmed if placed in circumstances which included those aids. In some cases the aids required to prevent an individual from being overwhelmed may be such as to destroy the person's capacity to respond *freely*. Such cases would contravene God's use of suffering for redemption. To avoid them, God may need control over external circumstances to ensure that no individual would be in such a situation.

More importantly, one must not get the idea here that *all* subjunctive conditionals whose consequents describe what God does or would do are genuine counterfactuals of divine freedom, and so not within the scope of His middle knowledge.[16] An example will make this clear. If God has middle knowledge, He knows:

(1) If Hitler were created and left free, he would order the construction of Auschwitz.

Suppose God also knows by His middle knowledge that:

(2) If Hitler were created and left free and orders the construction of Auschwitz, person P would end up there and not benefit from the suffering experienced.

(1) and (2) entail God's knowledge of:

(3) If Hitler were created and left free, he would order the construction of Auschwitz and person P would end up there and not benefit from the suffering experienced.

Now, (3) entails:

(4) If Hitler were created and left free, then Hitler would be created and left free and he would order the construction of Auschwitz and person P would end up there and not benefit from the suffering experienced.

And so God would know (4). But it seems that for Stump's theodicy to work,

[15] This line of objection was suggested by an anonymous referee.
[16] See Flint's *Divine Providence*, 42–43 and 194–195.

God must intervene in some way to prevent the suffering of any particular person which is not a benefit to that person. In other words, it appears to be a necessary truth that:

(5) Hitler's being created and left free and his ordering the construction of Auschwitz and person P's ending up there and not benefiting from the suffering experienced entail God's intervention to control P's suffering.

From (4) and (5) it follows that:

(6) If Hitler were created and left free, God would intervene to control P's suffering.

Suppose for the sake of argument that God's intervention in this case would consist of acting directly in some way on P's psyche.

The consequent of (6) describes what God does. But this does not mean that (6) is not an object of His middle knowledge. (6) follows from (1) through (5). By hypothesis, (1) and (2) are objects of middle knowledge. (3) and (4) are entailed by them. So God would know (1) through (4) logically prior to creation. Since (5) is a necessary truth which is true independently of God's will, it is included in God's natural knowledge, and so is also known prior to creation. Since (6) is only contingently true, it cannot be included in God's natural knowledge. But since God would know its truth prior to any creative decision He makes, it cannot be an object of His free knowledge. Hence, (6) is included in God's middle knowledge. Therefore, even if God can exercise control over suffering without acting on circumstances external to the sufferer, this does not show that middle knowledge is dispensable.

If one rejects middle knowledge, one will presumably include (6) in God's free knowledge. If counterfactuals such as (6) are contingently true, they are made true by God. But if that is so, one must then say that it just so happens that God always acts in such a way as to control suffering. His so acting as to make counterfactuals such as (6) true is always an individual act of His will. This is a matter of fact, not something which follows from His nature. But this means that to avoid including (6) in God's middle knowledge, one must deny God's *de re* perfect goodness, for it is this which licences the entailment in (5). I would not think that Stump would want to deny God's *de re* perfect goodness. If she is prepared to do that, then it is not the case that according to her theodicy God *must* intervene in some way to prevent the suffering of any particular person which is not a benefit to that person. But then her theodicy is much weaker than we were led to believe.

We are not just talking here about a single instance of suffering in the life of some arbitrarily chosen individual. Stump speaks of the lengthy process of sanctification (PE 408f). This is presumably the typical path to success. In such cases it seems reasonable to speak of the need for the long-term cumu-

lative effects of suffering on a person's character and subsequent choices, helping one to change from a destructive psychological state to a life-giving one, and thereby progressively bring oneself closer to the ultimate goal of union with God. Even in the case of deathbed repentance, earlier suffering might have been essential to the development of one's character and choices to the point where it is more likely that one will make the deathbed repentance (PE 412). Stump also speaks of those who live and die without the religious knowledge necessary for redemption. She speculates that in the process of their dying God acquaints them with what they need to know and offers them a last chance to choose. In these cases too, earlier suffering may have been essential for the development of their character to the point where they are in a position to be receptive to the last chance offer (PE 412).

God's responsibility for trying to fix and save fallen humanity goes beyond care for the victims of suffering. In the case of moral evil, it includes perpetrators of evil-doing. Inflicting or at least trying to inflict harm on others may be the only or best hope for their spiritual benefit (PE 415 and PPE 75). So it seems that God might need to put perpetrators in circumstances in which they actually inflict or try to inflict harm on others. If the harm to others would not ultimately bring the sufferer closer to union with God, God must intervene. He could simply remove the perpetrator's freedom in such cases. But it would surely be better if He could avoid doing that, for otherwise why create significant free creatures to begin with? And in some cases, e.g. that of Cain, intervening in this way would not be good for the perpetrator (PE 415). If the perpetrator's freedom is left intact, God must ensure that its successful exercise is a benefit to those who suffer because of it, though this does not mean that God must ensure that they suffer as little pain as possible. In this connection, Stump draws our attention to Abel. She says,

> He is apparently righteous at the time of his offering; and hence that is a safe, even a propitious, time for him to die, to make the transition from this life to the next. Given that he will die sometime, Abel's death at this time is if anything in Abel's interest; he dies at a time when he is accepted by God, and he enters into union with God (PE 415).[17]

For all this, it is reasonable to think that a considerable amount of planning and co-ordination by God of external events as well as gracious influences on each individual is needed. It is hard to see how this could be accomplished without middle knowledge. With respect to natural evil, it would seem that God needs detailed knowledge of what would result from any possible combination of indeterministic natural causes. He needs control over external events to the extent that He must ensure that those events which would

[17] For the idea that God mercifully takes the righteous from this world because he sees that they would lapse into mortal sin if they had not died prematurely, see Disputation 49, section 9 and Disputation 53, Part I, section 5 of Molina's *Corcordia*, translated with an introduction by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

lead to suffering which would overwhelm any individual or which would not be necessary for their moral or spiritual benefit do not occur. Or if they occur, God must intervene in such a way as to prevent their harmful consequences.

With respect to moral evil, it would seem that God needs detailed knowledge of what every potential perpetrator would do in any possible situation in which they were left free, and how every potential victim would react in any possible situation in which they suffered. God must ensure that those free actions which would lead to suffering which would not be a benefit to the sufferer do not occur. To accomplish this, God may not need control over external events as such. He may be able to act directly on the perpetrators. He may not need to remove their freedom on these occasions but simply grant them stronger or different supernatural aids, if it is true that they would freely refrain from evil-doing if placed in circumstances which included those aids. If God does allow them to exercise their freedom to do evil, He must ensure that this does not overwhelm the victims. To accomplish this, God may need control over external events either by prior planning or interventions in the nick of time. In other cases, He may be able to act directly on sufferers by granting them stronger or different supernatural aids, if it is true that they would benefit if placed in circumstances which included those aids.

Hasker once objected to Stump's account in part because she offered no support whatsoever for her claim that evil is the only or best possible means for bringing people to repentance and salvation.[18] One would think that middle knowledge provides the best if not only possible way of filling that gap, though of course we do not know the truth-values of the counterfactuals in question.

V

Stump will undoubtedly insist that the above requirements are too strong. God's knowledge of would-probably conditionals would be good enough. The claim that she needs middle knowledge is, she may argue, based on a serious misreading of her account. In particular, it seems to suppose that for her account to work, there must be a *guarantee* that suffering will benefit those who suffer. But that, she will insist, is a big mistake. In fact, this seems to be the chief reason why she does not want to endorse middle knowledge. She seems to think that if God has middle knowledge, there would be a guarantee that suffering benefits sufferers. But since there can be no such guarantee if we are free, middle knowledge is to be rejected (PPE 90, note 53 and PE 410). She seems to think that she would only need middle knowledge in case she were committed to the claim that God is justified in permitting the suffering of a person only if He knows that it will be to the maximum benefit

[18] 'Suffering, soul-making, and salvation', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, **28** (1988), 11.

of that person.[19] But surely suffering occasionally makes a person worse off than they would otherwise be (PE 410). She might, in other words, argue that those of us who think she needs middle knowledge have been misled in large part by an overly strong interpretation of the sense in which suffering must be a *benefit* on her account.

That suffering must be a benefit to the sufferer is ambiguous in some important ways. First, as already noted, suffering might incline a person to God or it might actually turn a person to Him. Stump apparently only needs to claim the former. More importantly, Stump makes heavy weather over a distinction between suffering which is a benefit in the sense that it is for the *greater good* of the sufferer and suffering which *wards off a greater harm* to the sufferer.[20] She insists on this distinction in part for the completeness of her account. The former is typically God's reason for permitting the evil suffered by committed believers (e.g. in cases of martyrdom), while the latter is God's reason for permitting the evil suffered by those who are alienated from Him.[21] Leaving aside those who are committed believers, Stump has strong moral reasons for wanting to insist on the above distinction for those sufferers who are alienated from God, viz. that in general we are less inclined to think that allowing involuntary undeserved suffering for the greater good of the sufferer is morally permissible. I think this is right, though one might doubt the moral weight or significance of this distinction in the case of a being such as God.

My main worry about Stump's insistence that suffering be a benefit to alienated sufferers in the sense that it must typically ward off a greater harm to them is that this seems to trivially satisfy the necessary conditions for God's permission of evil, thus making her account vacuous. One wonders whether there are any real limits on God's use of suffering, i.e. whether just anything goes here. If the 'greater harm' is permanent separation from God and unending death in hell, which she thinks would be the case for all in the absence of God's 'help', in relation to that harm everything that happens to us seems to count as a lesser harm, and hence is justified. This lets God off the hook too easily. If might-conditionals are not sufficient for this, God only seems to need would-probablys whose probability is extremely low to get off the hook, for in relation to the otherwise inevitable eternal separation of fallen creatures from Him, the object of God's action (i.e. His permission of evil) is always good or could never be bad, no matter how intense, degrading, etc. the evil suffered. So long as there is any non-zero chance, no matter how

[19] If this is her view, I think it rests on the mistaken assumption that middle knowledge entails that all evil is absorbed. I argue that this is a mistake in 'Molinism and theodicy', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, **44** (1998), 163–184.

[20] This distinction came to the fore subsequent to PE and continues to have a prominent role in her recent writings. See, e.g., 'Saadia Gaon on the problem of evil', *Faith and Philosophy*, **14** (1997), 523–549.

[21] Stump's account is actually much more complex. Where God's intervention would have prevented an even greater harm, God might still be justified in not intervening, e.g., if the object of God's action would treat someone unjustly or leave her uncompensated.

slim, that the evil suffered will be a benefit in this sense, God is justified in bringing it about or permitting it.

I do not think it will do for Stump to reply that the idea that nothing bad ever really happens to a person is just what one should expect to follow from the assumption of a provident God (PPE 69). If the probabilities of the conditionals God is working with are or can be as low as the above suggests, I do not think it would be unreasonable to view God as a less than perfectly loving, reckless risk-taker. After all, God did not have to create any significantly free creatures. The lower the probabilities, the greater the risk. If God is not reckless, the account of providence which emerges on this picture is extremely weak, too weak I think to begin to merit the label. At the least it is certainly much weaker than the Thomistic account of providence which Stump herself seems inclined to endorse in numerous writings.

Low probabilities pose an additional problem. If some conditionals have an extremely low probability, their negations are extremely probable. So if the probability that I would benefit from suffering if placed in circumstance C is 0·1, say, the probability that I would not benefit is 0·9. If it is required that the suffering in question be a benefit to me in the sense that it inclines me to God more than it does not, it seems that we need probabilities greater than 0·5. This would certainly lessen the risk for God, and correspondingly increase His providential control. The risk may not then be reckless, but the closer the probability is to 0·5, the greater the risk and weaker the account of providence. To lessen the risk even more and to increase God's providential control, as well as to tighten up the right connection between any particular instance of suffering and its benefit, God presumably was guided by those conditionals whose probabilities were closest to 1, and selected their antecedents. This seems the best He could do without middle knowledge.

But could the probability of God's success in His use of evil for redemption in even a single person's life have been anything close to 1? If we are talking about long-term probabilities, which are presumably a function of short-term probabilities, this looks doubtful. Probabilities decrease when multiplied. Of course Stump might argue that if the probabilities are all extremely high, then even with the decrease due to multiplication this could still yield long-term probabilities which are very high, and hence justify the claim that God might know that a certain course of action would probably benefit a certain individual.[22] Is it plausible to think that the probabilities in the would-probably conditionals could all be extremely high?

The answer may depend in part on how many free decisions a person makes. How many decisions are involved in performing a single free action? How many decisions does a person make in a year? How many decision-points are there in a single person's lifetime? If we suppose that the would-

[22] This reply was suggested by an anonymous referee.

probably conditionals all have a probability of 0·9, when multiplied, only seven decision-points are needed for the long-term probability to get below 0·5. If we suppose that all have a probability of 0·99, it would take sixty-nine decision-points to get below 0·5. Libertarians disagree among themselves over how many of our actions are free. Stump may want to restrict our freedom to just a few fundamental choices. If so and the probabilities are all extremely high, it would seem that God could know that a person would probably benefit from suffering.

But would Stump really want to maintain that the probabilities are all extremely high? The claim that they are is odd. Why do anti-Molinists reject the possibility of any true would-counterfactuals? Answer: they think this would rob us of our libertarian freedom. But if one believes that probabilities of 1 rob us of our freedom, is it plausible to suppose that probabilities of 0·99 or higher do not? The idea that I am free just because there is one in a thousand chance, say, that I will not do what the consequent of the conditional describes, strikes me as absurd. So if one is going to reject Molinism on the ground that it robs us of our freedom, I cannot see why one would want to maintain that the probabilities of would-probably conditionals are all extremely high. But if not all are extremely high, the long-term probabilities will decrease rapidly when multiplied.

That the probabilities could all be extremely high seems implausible for additional reasons. The antecedents of the would-probably conditionals will be rather rich. The circumstances in which I find myself at any time will depend not only on my own previous free decisions, if any, and their results, but on a host of factors external to me. Factor in the history of the world up to the time of my action. In doing so, consider countless millions of my world-mates. Factor in all the free decisions they have made and their results over thousands of years. Factor in indeterminism in nature, if nature is indeterministic. Is it still plausible to maintain that the probabilities of the conditionals about me are all extremely high? It is difficult to see that it is. So even if one places a severe restriction on the number of free decisions in a single person's life, it is doubtful that without middle knowledge God could have known that the particular suffering any person experiences would probably be a benefit to them.

Suppose, however, that I am wrong. This would still not seem to be good enough for Stump's account. To see why, let us consider what would count as a global failure condition on God's use of suffering for redemption.

There is textual evidence to suggest that Stump would agree that God's use of suffering for redemption would fail if the majority of people end up in hell (PE 412). But if the success of her theodicy requires God's knowledge that the majority of people would not end up in hell and that the majority would end up in heaven, she must endorse middle knowledge. Without middle knowledge, God could not know that more would not freely reject

Him and end up in hell; He could not know that more would freely will in accordance with His will and end up in heaven. Molinists are not saying that without middle knowledge God's plan for the use of suffering would fail. If there are no true would-conditionals to be known, one cannot say that. But neither can one say that God's plan would not fail or that it would succeed. One could say these things only if the probabilities of the conditionals were 0 or 1, which is just another way of saying that some would-conditionals are true.

Without middle knowledge, God's overall use of evil for redemption could succeed, but if it does, it would be a matter of God's good luck. If caution, not luck, is a moral category, it is not obvious that a perfectly good God would create any significantly free beings if He did not have middle knowledge. God could not simply change the grading curve, i.e. just decide to allow more into heaven, in case the failure rate was getting out of hand. This will not do if freely willing in accordance with His will is a necessary condition for union with Him. In addition, if the goodness or success of God's plan could depend directly on what God does, the charge of recklessness in the creation of significantly free creatures would look pretty decisive.

Without middle knowledge, it would seem that God could at best know that the majority would probably will in accordance with His will. But it is doubtful that God could even have known that, if the probability is alleged to be very high. Once again, probabilities decrease when multiplied, and I have given reasons for doubting that the individual probabilities could all have been extremely high. If we model God's plan as a branching tree-like structure, it could take only a few big surprises, especially early on, to upset the probability of a good result. Of course God could decide to intervene miraculously in case a surprise occurs, and this could set things back on track again. But without middle knowledge He could at best know that by so intervening the desired outcome would probably occur. But then there is nothing in principle to prevent the need for a series of such interventions. We could end up with just the sort of series of frustrations and defeats Stump wants to reject as inappropriate to deity (PE 405). She insists that God's providential plan will succeed; His resourcefulness and ingenuity in successfully responding to whatever creatures freely choose in order to achieve His end is limited only by our imaginations (PPE 74f). In the absence of any details of the mechanism of providence without middle knowledge, this is nothing more than the mere assurance that deep down all is well.

To get around these difficulties, Stump might simply deny the above failure condition. Alternatively, she might accept it but insist that even if God's plan did fail, He was justified in pursuing it. She might admit that without middle knowledge there could be no guarantee that the majority of people would seek God's help. There would be no guarantee that a single person would do so. If the majority do not seek God's help, and even if a

single person does not, then of course what justifies God's use of suffering is not the cure! Rather, what justifies it is that the therapy was the best available means for the cure. The cure of even a single person would be so valuable that it is worth the risk, however great, of getting it (PPE 52–53 and 91, note 60).

If this is where we are led in the end, it strikes me as a dark dead-end alley. It seems that Stump is committed to saying that significant freedom would be so valuable regardless of how creatures misused it. But if so, her account seems to collapse into precisely the sort of abstract general good theodicy she wanted to avoid. At the least her account is open to the same objection she had to such theodicies. For reasons already given, it is doubtful that without middle knowledge God could have known with any high degree of probability that the therapy in question would lead to a cure, except in the weak sense that without any therapy, we would all be damned. But then the reckless risk-taking objection returns with a vengeance. Satisficing arguments are typically more forceful the less an agent knows and the greater the stake or cost of losing. God does not need middle knowledge to ensure that a good world without any significantly free creatures is actual. If God did not know that the majority of significantly free creatures, if created, would will in accordance with His will, or even that a single creature would, the gamble on such freedom looks reckless. It is reasonable to think that Stump's account fails as even a general answer to the question of why God allows innocents to suffer unless God has middle knowledge. It just does not seem that would-probably conditionals could give God the information I think she thinks God needs to have.

VI

Hasker once posed a dilemma for Stump. For her scheme to work, God must exercise at least as much control as would be afforded by middle knowledge. Yet, if God does have middle knowledge, the central idea of her theodicy is in serious trouble. Why? Because in some cases God chooses or permits inflicted suffering in the full knowledge that it will be unavailing and bring the sufferer no spiritual benefit.[23] My aim in this paper has in effect been to defend the first horn of the dilemma. I have made no attempt to defend her theodicy. Rather, if I am right, then if Stump is on the right track, Molinism is not a dispensable component of a successful theodicy. That her theodicy might *look* harder to sustain than some others would be no vice of Stump or Molinism. If, on the other hand, her theodicy is untenable in the end, so much the worse for it rather than Molinism. The details of her account are hardly entailed by Molinism.

[23] *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 201–202. Hasker notes that Stump acknowledged the difficulty in conversation.

Nevertheless, I wish to conclude by suggesting some ways Stump could accept Hasker's first horn but reject the second.[24] For a start, the second horn seems to assume that the benefit of each instance of suffering must be immediate as opposed to long-term, and we have already seen some reasons for doubting this. In addition, it assumes that there is no immediate or long-term benefit to a person in some cases. Stump herself, as we have seen, admits this insofar as she concedes that on occasion it seems that suffering makes a person worse off than they would otherwise be. She could, however, deny that this is really so, or say that it may be true only immediately but not in the long term.

This will surely strike many as wildly implausible and morally outrageous. The central idea of Stump's theodicy has been attacked on both counts. She has responded to the former charge in several ways. She thinks we have few, if any, intuitions about the redemption of other people and what is conducive to it. If the complaint is that her theodicy turns ordinary secular views on their head, she thinks this is a virtue not a vice of her account; at the least, this is just what one should expect of a Christian solution to the problem of evil. To those objectors who also endorse an abstract general good theodicy, Stump has a *tu quoque* of her own. What is wildly implausible is that we could have deep trust and love in a God who we believed had the power to alleviate our suffering but who permits us to suffer undeservedly and involuntarily in the interest of some global or common good.[25] She might also urge that the justifying moral principle in these theodicies is morally outrageous.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty, however, is that Stump does concede, apparently as more than just a logical possibility, that some individuals exercise their freedom to resist God's help to the end; they die impenitent and are consigned to hell. Though she denies that there is any reason to think that the majority of created persons end up in hell, it is hard to see how a perfectly good God could create persons which He foreknew by His middle knowledge would end up in hell despite His best effort to save them. There is a difficulty here all right, but it is not clear that middle knowledge is the culprit. Hell is a problem for any Christian who admits its possibility or actuality. I see little if any reason to think that Molinism makes a doctrine of hell worse. What relevant moral difference is there between an account of hell to which Molinism is added and that same account without it? God's prior ignorance of the fact, if it is one, that a person would freely reject Him and be consigned to hell, together with the claim that it is the person's fault not God's, just does not seem to get God off the hook. Without middle knowledge a person would not be damned on the basis of God's conditional knowledge that she would reject God to the end if created, but if God has

[24] Also see note 19 above.

[25] See e.g. Stump's 'The mirror of evil' in Thomas V. Morris (ed.) *God and the Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 246.

a clue about what is going on as creation unfolds, He would know with virtual certainty that this would be the case close to the person's final act of impenitence. The alternative seems to be recklessness.

Short of an appeal to mystery, one could turn universalist. Molinism does not entail a doctrine of hell. On the contrary, middle knowledge can easily support a belief in universal salvation.[26] Surprisingly, the two have not been conjoined in the literature. I find it particularly odd that one of the most vigorous proponents of universalism, Marilyn McCord Adams, is also one of the stauchest anti-Molinists. One would think not only that universalism is compatible with Molinism, but in fact requires it. How could God know or ensure that all *free* creatures would be saved without middle knowledge?

On the assumption that Stump does not take this turn, she could bite the bullet and simply deny that there is no benefit to an individual even in the case of consignment to hell. This, in fact, is her reply. She says:

> The torments of hell are the natural conditions of some persons, and God can spare such persons those pains only by depriving them of their nature or their existence. And it is arguable that, of the alternatives open to God, maintaining such persons in existence and as human is the best .... [O]n the Dantean view, hell is the natural state and, even understood as unending, it is arguably the best possible state of those whose free wills are not in conformity with the divine will, on the assumption that continued existence as a human being even with pain is more valuable than the absence of that pain at the cost of one's existence or human nature (PE 401–402).

This looks desperate. But it is hard to see how one could begin to swallow it without endorsing middle knowledge.[27]

[26] See Hasker's *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 201, note 21.

[27] I wish to thank two anonymous referees and the Editor for their comments and suggestions on the penultimate version. I also thank Tom Flint for early correspondence.