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God's goodness and God's evil

JAMES KELLENBERGER

Department of Philosophy, California State University, 18111 Nordhoff St, Northridge, CA 91330

Abstract: Starting with Job's reaction to evil, I identify three elements of Job-like belief. They are: (1) the recognition of evil in the world; (2) the conviction that God and God's creation are good; and (3) the sense of beholding God's goodness in the world. The interconnection of these three elements is examined along with a possible way of understanding Job-like believers beholding and becoming experientially aware of God's goodness. It is brought out why, given that they are as they understand themselves to be, Job-like believers properly do not see evil as evidence against God's goodness. Finally, Job-like belief is related to the different reactions to evil by Ivan and Aloysha in *The Brothers Karamazov.*

Introduction

It is hard to deny that evil is real. Natural evils, such as earthquakes, storms, and disease, and moral evils, consisting of the morally wrong or evil things that humans do to one another, directly or indirectly, confront us daily. Some have seen the evil of the world, or its 'superfluous evil', as contradictory to, and so a conclusive argument against, the existence of God.[1] Others have seen evil as requiring some reason for its existence, in the light of which we can, in John Milton's phrase, 'justify the ways of God to men', a theodicy of some sort.[2] There is another reaction to the evils of the world, however. When Job loses his riches and his sons and daughters, and then is himself afflicted with disease, his wife, in her despair, addresses him in his loss and suffering and advises him to 'Curse God and die'. Job replies with a rhetorical question: 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' In saying this, in acknowledging that evils are a part of God's domain or creation, we are told, Job does not sin with his lips (Job 1.9–10).[3]

In what follows, I will explore Job's position, or better, Job's self-understanding vis-à-vis evil. There are, to be sure, several interpretations of the Book of Job, and of Job. Job may be understood as one seeking from God a reason for his suffering and for there being evil in the world. He may be seen as the personification of innocent suffering in an indifferent universe, or as an argument against a caring or just God. I will explore the internal logic of Job's position or self-understanding, on a particular reading of the Book of Job. My concern is not to defend the exegesis I will draw upon. It is to explore the structure of Job's position or self-understanding vis-à-vis evil, given that exegesis. More accurately, I want to examine the internal logic of a Job-like believer's position vis-à-vis evil. To do so I will need to fill out the Joban position and in doing this I will go beyond the Book of Job, but not beyond the broader biblical tradition.

In that broader tradition, or the strain of it that I will follow, I find three main elements in Job-like belief: first, the concession, even the insistence, that there is great evil in the world, natural and moral evil; second, the acknowledgment and utter conviction that God and God's creation are good. These two elements are embodied in the reading of the Book of Job that informs my exploration, even if they – especially the second – are not embodied in other readings of the Book of Job. The third element is the sense that God's goodness, love, and righteousness can be experienced or beheld in God's creation. This element, though not evident in the Book of Job, is alive and well in a strain of the broader biblical tradition. In the following discussion, I will try to bring into relief the logic of a Joban self-understanding, or rather, the logic of a Job-like believer's self-understanding, by clarifying the interconnectedness of these three elements.

Job's suffering

Job suffers natural or physical evil, but also moral evil. Both are included in the Joban recognition of the reality of evil. Job, in his acceptance of the evil that he and his family have endured at the hand of God, is referring to the natural evils of the fire that consumed his sheep and servants, the great wind that destroyed the house of his eldest son and killed all his sons and daughters, and the disease that afflicts his own body. He is, as well, referring to the moral evil of the raiders who slew his servants and stole his herds (Job 1 and 2). Job, in the prologue, speaks out of his personal suffering caused by these natural and moral evils. However, the sufferings of his children and of his wife also are evils, and as the rest of the Book of Job makes clear, Job is aware that evils of both kinds are visited upon human beings generally. Subsequent Job-like believers have been aware of natural evils half a world away in the form of famines and disease, and of moral evils in the form of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and as expressed in great and small acts of malice.

While it is true that Job would 'fill [his] mouth with arguments' and make his case to God (Job 23.4), on the understanding of the Book of Job that I am following, he does not seek God's reason for allowing evil. He does not seek to establish a theodicy.[4] Rather, he tries to defend himself against the charge that his suffering is deserved as punishment for his sinful and wrongful actions in the hope that he 'should be acquitted for ever by [his] judge' (Job 23.7). The view here, as Elihu puts it, is that 'according to the work of a man [the Almighty] will requite him' (Job 34.11).[5] This is the view of Job's condition put forward by Elihu and Job's three friends and 'comforters', whose dialogue with Job makes up most of the Book of Job. In speaking to their charge and arguing for his innocence Job accepts their assumption. In the long run, only the guilty are made to suffer. So Job argues for his innocence (Job 31). But this view of suffering is mistaken: the innocent also suffer.[6] When God speaks out of the whirlwind and rebukes Job for speaking without understanding, on my reading, He is rebuking Job for taking up his interlocutors' view of suffering as punishment. Here Job has erred, for, along with his interlocutors, he has wrongly, if not arrogantly, assumed that he understood the ways of God. But, on my reading, Job never doubts the goodness of God or His creation (the second element of the tradition of Job-like believers). If Job had doubted God's goodness, his faith would have failed, for his trust in God and in His goodness would have failed.

Though Job's soul is bitter (Job 27.2), and his heart is in turmoil (Job 30.27), Job's faith in God never falters. His faith does not falter even though he does not understand God's reason for allowing, if not creating, evil, in particular the great evil that the Lord has brought upon him. In the Book of Job, certainly in the prologue, and throughout, if the exegesis I am following is correct, Job maintains his faith in God. Though he has received evil from God, Job continues to believe in God's goodness, in particular His goodness toward him. Job's faith, thus understood, fits with a traditional biblical understanding of God: God is good and His creation is good (Genesis 1). Job does not know why he has been afflicted with evil, but as long as he trusts in God, he believes, and must believe, that God is good. He, in fact, affirms that he *knows* that his Redeemer lives (Job 19.25), and in this utterance we have Job's expression of absolute faith in God and His goodness. Job does not seek a theodicy, then, because he does not have the religious problem of evil. He does not feel the need to find God's reason for the evil He allows or creates in order to continue to believe in God's goodness. It is not that he already has a theodicy. He does not, nor does God, speaking out of the whirlwind, provide Job with his reason for evil. Job does not even have what we may call a 'theological interest' in the religious problem of evil. He is not among those who have sought to justify God's ways to men, to defend God, or to show that God's existence, as an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful Being, is compatible with the existence of evil, not necessarily for the sake of their own faith, but to buttress the faith of others or simply to try to resolve the theological problem.

The third element of Job-like belief

For Job to continue to have faith in God he must trust in God, and his continuing trust in God requires his belief in God's goodness. His belief in God's goodness does not require an understanding of God's reason for allowing or creating evil. It is, however, essential that Job unfalteringly believes in God's goodness and the goodness of God's creation (the second element in Job-like belief). But whence this conviction? Job *knows* his Redeemer lives. Whence this knowledge? These questions bring us to the third element of Job-like belief. In order to pursue these questions, and to address the third element, we need now to bring into our purview more of the biblical tradition as it relates to Job-like belief. In particular we need to look at a strain of the biblical tradition that I find well represented in the Psalms.

In the Psalms and elsewhere, for this tradition, there is a beholding of God and God's goodness in what is majestic and quotidian in creation. The Psalmist is aware of God's presence in all of his life: the heavens tell of the glory of the Lord, but God is also present in the Psalmist's going out and coming in (Psalms 19.1 and 121.8).[7] The Psalmist could not escape God's presence should he want to: '[W]hither shall I flee from thy presence?' the Psalmist asks; even in Sheol, God is there, and even though the Psalmist should 'take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea', God is there to lead him (Psalms 139.7–9). But the Psalmist's experience of God is also an experience of the goodness of God. 'O taste and see that the LORD is good!' he cries (Psalms 34.8). 'The heavens proclaim his righteousness' (Psalms 97.6); '[T]he LORD is good; his steadfast love endures for ever' (Psalms 100.5); 'Thy steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, thy faithfulness to the clouds' (Psalms 36.5). In various Psalms the Psalmist speaks of God's goodness, love, righteousness, and mercy.

This strain of religious sensibility, evident in the Psalms, does not begin or end with the Psalms. Here is a twentieth-century expression of this sensibility: 'Walking in a garden, or through the fields, a man of sensitive spirit may suddenly become livingly aware, through the contemplation of the beauty and richness and orderly reliability of nature, of the steadfast goodness of God toward man – including himself – in all his weakness and dependency.'[8] It is a part of the self-understanding of the Job-like believer that she/he is *aware* of God's goodness in the things of life, in God's creation. This, again, is not to be aware of God's reason for allowing or creating evil, but to be aware of God's effulgent goodness and, in particular, of God's goodness toward oneself. The analogy here is believing in, or knowing, the goodness of another person, in particular her/his goodness toward oneself, which is the soul of trust in another. The Job-like believer, in believing in and in experiencing the goodness of God, finds her/himself in a relationship to God, a relationship of trust or faith in God and in God's goodness.

The particularly revealing instantiation of the analogy is a child's trust of a parent. In a happy parent–child relationship, the child is aware of the loving parent's goodness toward her/him and trusts the parent, even if the reasons for the parent's decisions are often not understood. In this way, in the strain of biblical tradition I am drawing upon, God is thought of as a loving father, a heavenly father, or, just as appropriately, as a mother. Julian of Norwich, in her *Showings*, says,

> The mother may sometimes suffer the child to fall and to be distressed in various ways, for its own benefit, but she can never suffer any kind of peril to come to her child, because of her love. And though our earthly mother may suffer her child to perish our heavenly Mother Jesus may never suffer us who are his children to perish … .[9]

Eleonore Stump in her quasi-autobiographical essay, 'The mirror of evil', also uses the image of God as a loving mother, and she says that Job 'in seeing the face of a loving God … has an answer to his question about why God afflicted him … a general answer [that] lets Job see that God allows his suffering for his own spiritual or psychological good, out of love for him'.[10] Stump is close to Julian in the reason for suffering that she puts forward: suffering is for one's own benefit or one's own spiritual good. To offer such a reason is to offer a proto-theodicy, and I have suggested that we do not find a theodicy in the Book of Job. On my reading, Job's trust in God does not fail, and so we may say, using a phrase used by Julian that is a variant of a phrase found in the Psalms, that Job, believing in God's goodness, believes that all will be well.[11] But to believe that all will be well is not to offer a reason for evil; it is simply to affirm one's trust in an all-powerful God's goodness. To the extent that the Job-like believer is aware of God's goodness and love, she/he is aware that all will be well, even in the absence of an understood reason for one's suffering and for evil generally.

There is another valuable element of Stump's essay that we should notice at this point. In the passage just quoted, Stump allows that Job 'see[s] the face of a loving God'. She is aware that when we humans recognize one another it is by means of a 'cognitive facult[y] that we don't understand much about but regularly and appropriately rely upon'.[12] Our intuitive recognition of evil, and of goodness, she suggests, is similar in its reliance on cognitive faculties not well understood. So, seeing the face of God will involve this kind of intuitive recognition. Her point is useful, I think. I would observe, however, that the category of experience in the Psalms is not seeing the face of God; it is coming into the presence of God, and, often, coming into the presence of a loving and righteous God. Experiencing the presence of God, of a loving God, in creation, though, would be like recognizing the face of someone in that it would not be by means of a definitive feature we can specify. If so, such a beholding of God's loving presence would be very different from reasoning to God's existence or love on the basis of design. It would be like a child's being aware of a parent's caring love though the general presentation of the parent's loving presence. As in the quotation above, one may become aware of God's goodness through the general 'contemplation' of the beauty and richness of nature.

God's goodness

For the Job-like believer, then, there is the sense that she/he is aware of God's goodness; and if Job-like believers are as they understand themselves to be, they are indeed aware of God's goodness. Allowing this much leaves open the character of God's goodness and of the goodness of God's creation; and some have suggested that the goodness of God or of God's creation should not be understood as *moral* goodness. Marilyn McCord Adams and John Wilcox see divine goodness as a form of *aesthetic* goodness. For Adams, divine incommensurate goodness is to be understood aesthetically, and for Wilcox, in the Book of Job, nature's goodness is its beauty.

Adams is concerned with 'horrendous evils', which she understands as great evils, 'the participation in which … constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant's life could … be a great good to him/her on the whole'.[13] Examples of horrendous evil include the Holocaust, other mass exterminations and genocides, and, at the individual level, rape and child abuse. While Adams argues that horrendous evils and the existence of God's goodness are possible together, she does not offer a divine morally sufficient reason for allowing such evils. She believes that seeking such a 'global' morally sufficient reason that God might have is misguided, and that such proffered reasons are ultimately unsatisfying.[14] Rather, she seeks to show that horrendous evils are compossible with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God by turning attention to the aesthetic dimension of individual lives.

She does not argue that God allows horrendous evils because such evils, though negatively valued in isolation, are necessary for the final beauty of the whole.[15] Her focus is on individual persons and their experience of or participation in horrendous evil. For Adams, individual human lives have an important aesthetic dimension in which 'life narratives' are constructed, and horrendous evils operate in that dimension in that they interrupt the effort of individual human persons to fashion 'the materials of their lives into wholes of positive significance'. For Adams, what is 'criterial for solving the problem of horrendous evils [is] the idea that God guarantee to created persons lives that are great goods to them on the whole'. God must '*beautify* the person'. This would be done by God's giving individual persons what is needed to 'recognize and appropriate meanings sufficient to render [her/his life] worth living' in the face of experienced horrendous evil.[16] God must give the individual the imaginative power to weave horrendous evils into a narrative that creates a life narrative of positive meaning.

Wilcox's approach is different. Wilcox, heeding God's speeches toward the end of the Book of Job, argues that God does not establish the justice of His ways (which is in accord with our earlier observation). Rather, God shows Job the smallness of human understanding and beyond that, Wilcox argues, God brings

Job to see 'the goodness, or beauty, or awesomeness of the created world of nature', but it is a beauty in 'some amoral and often harsh sense'.[17] Wilcox seems to be very much aware that one might come to see the awesomeness of nature – in the presence of lightning and thunder, storms, the great beasts of nature, and the movements of the heavens – and have no sense of God's moral presence.[18]

The suggestion I find in the biblical tradition I am following is that we humans are such that when we are allowed to lift up our eyes and to behold God's creation, we will behold God's goodness, righteousness, and love in it, so that, in addition to our standing in awe before the transcendent majesty of creation, we might well be moved to bless the name of the Lord and to be joyful. In the same way, in this biblical tradition, upon being given the capacity to find positive meaning in our lives in the face of horrendous evil we might thank God for His goodness toward us. Beholding God's goodness, we trust God and thereby enter into, or revivify, a trusting relationship to God: we have faith in God and believe, in the Psalmist's phrase, that all will be well. Is this beheld goodness God's *moral* goodness reflected in the moral goodness of creation? I think that it includes a moral dimension. In the strain of religious tradition I am drawing upon, God's unfaltering goodness, love, and righteousness are never in doubt. A Job-like believer feels aware of God's goodness, love, and righteousness. If we become aware of the beneficent love or concern that another person has toward us, surely we become aware of something of moral significance in her/his attitude toward us. So too with the Job-like believer's becoming aware of God's love toward her or him, and God's righteousness toward all: God's goodness in this tradition must be in significant part moral goodness.

On the other hand, beholding God's goodness and love in creation is not to discover God's moral reason for allowing or creating evil, and this means that there is a gap in our understanding of God's goodness, given the way we most often think of moral goodness. If a person is morally good, then if she/he does not prevent evil, she/he must have a morally sufficient reason for not doing so. Furthermore, if we enter the judgement that a person has such a reason for not preventing some evil, great or small, we should be able to cite this reason.

Now, even if we could somehow propose a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing or creating evil, in embracing any such divine morally sufficient reason, we may feel the kind of moral repugnance that Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* felt at the prospect of God's making human happiness rest on the suffering of a tortured child. When Alyosha's brother Ivan asks him if *he* would consent to being the architect of such a world order, Alyosha says that he would not.[19] The sort of reason that God might have for the evils done to children, and all the other moral and natural evils of the world, defies our moral imagination – a point that Marilyn McCord Adams sees with great clarity.[20]

Still, *if* we have come to know that God is good and is loving, then we can be confident that God's goodness will prevail, and all will be well, even if we cannot speak of God's reasons for evil.

The cognitive position of Job-like believers

If we allow that Job-like believers are aware of God's goodness, and so are as they understand themselves to be, then we should allow that they have a particular cognitive standing regarding evil that determines their logical attitude toward evil as being no evidence whatsoever against God's existence. In fact, they *properly* would not regard evil as evidence of any sort or degree against God's goodness or existence. For if they know there is a God whose goodness shines through creation, then whatever might seem to others to be evidence against God's goodness cannot really be that. The logic here is general. If someone, S, knows something, P, then what appears to others to be evidence against P will not appear to S to be evidence against P, and, moreover, it will not be evidence against P if S really knows P to be true. If I know that I have just put three oranges in the bowl before me on the table, I will not take it as evidence that there are only two if someone says from across the room that she can see only two or if I see an image of the bowl in a mirror that shows only two. Of course in a case like this there is always a possibility (in a weak sense of 'possibility') that one is mistaken in the initial judgement, and so does not really know – I might have put only two oranges in the bowl, thinking I handled three, perhaps due to distraction.

So let us consider another case where the possibility of initial error is eliminated or reduced to an utter minimum. Let us say that I, a house guest in a wealthy home, one night, after all are asleep, steal the jewels of my hostess. In order to cover my tracks I frame the butler. I plant evidence that will incriminate him. I leave his glove by the jewel cabinet. I lift his fingerprints from a drinking glass and transfer them to the glass of the cabinet. I use the key to the jewel cabinet issued to him and leave it in the cabinet lock. The police are called and dutifully investigate. As I planned, they find the evidence I planted: the glove, the fingerprints, the key. As they collect these items of evidence (as the police take them to be), the police, quite properly, begin to think that the butler did it. But should I, along with the police, begin to think that, after all, perhaps the butler did it? Clearly not. Notice that it does not really matter whether I planted the evidence. Say that the butler had just happened to leave his glove at the scene, his fingerprints on the cabinet glass, and his key in the lock. Still I would be quite irrational to take these items as evidence that the butler had stolen the jewels when I know full well that I took them. These items, I could allow, are *seeming* evidence that the butler did it, which, from my standpoint, are fortuitously taken to be real evidence by the police. But I would be quite irrational if I took them to be any real evidence at all that the butler had committed the crime. The same holds in other cases of knowing.

Thus, given that the Job-like believer *knows* that God is good and that God's goodness shines through creation, she/he would not, and should not, see evil as any evidence against God's goodness.

While we may have a question about whether Job-like believers are truly aware of God's goodness, they have no such question; and thus it is not surprising if they, like Job in the prologue when he replies to his wife, do not see evil as evidence against God's goodness. Moreover, if they are as they see themselves, they are right in not regarding evil as evidence against God's goodness. Job-like believers, if they wished, could of course pursue the problem of evil out of what I earlier called a 'theological interest'. If they did so, then the problem of evil would be for them, in Nelson Pike's words, a 'non-crucial perplexity of relatively minor importance'.[21] Pike suggests that this is the case for those who accept God's existence as an 'item of faith' and for those who hold God's existence on the 'basis of an a priori argument'. Those with either of these positions do not approach the subject of God's existence as a 'quasi-scientific subject', arguing for the existence of God on the basis of observed facts. It is only for this latter approach, taken by Cleanthes in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Pike argues, that evil can weigh against other observations and take on the import of negative evidence.

I believe that Pike makes an important point here, but we should appreciate that the cognitive status of Job-like believers is distinguishable from the status of those who accept God's existence on faith and distinguishable from the status of those who rely upon an a priori argument. Those who accept it as an item of faith that God exists (whose faith does not have a provenance and grounding in an experience of God, as it does for Job-like believers), would seem to have to give some evidential weight to evil, even if they have not formed their belief in God through a 'quasi-scientific' weighing of evidence for and against; for the existence of evil would seem to be some indication that their belief in an all-good and all-powerful God is false. At least they could not regard evil as evidentially irrelevant because they *know* God is good, as Job-like believers can do.[22] Those who accept the existence of God on the basis of an a priori argument will have knowledge of God's existence only if the argument they depend on is logically sound. Their discounting evil as evidence, then, is contingent on the logical soundness of an argument, while this is not the case with Job-like believers, who behold God's existence and goodness in creation.

Seeing God's goodness through evil

The scope and penetration of the Job-like believer's perception of God's goodness can hardly be overestimated. Eleonore Stump in 'The mirror of evil' says this:

> … in an odd sort of way, the mirror of evil can also lead us to God. A loathing focus on the evils of our world and ourselves prepares us to be the more startled by the taste of true

> goodness when we find it and the more determined to follow that taste until we see where it leads. And where it leads is to the truest goodness of all … . The mirror of evil becomes translucent, and we can see through it to the goodness of God.[23]

There are, I believe, two associated ideas here. One is that our perception of evils can *lead to* an awareness of God and God's goodness: focusing on evil we can, in the terms of the Psalms, come to taste more keenly goodness when we find it in human affairs and then come to see – become aware of – God's ultimate goodness. The other idea is that we can come to see God's goodness *through* experiencing evil. Both ideas are at home in the tradition of Job-like belief, but the second idea is, in particular. In that tradition, evil is not evidence against God's goodness, and evil, being from God, can only be an expression of and 'mirror' God's goodness.[24]

Job-like believers do not seek a theodicy as something relevant to their faith because they do not have the problem of evil that seeks a theodicy. It is a part of God's goodness that we should receive evil from God. If, however, the evil becomes unendurable so that it comes to seem to such a believer that God, if God is good, would not allow such things to happen, then doubt enters and the believer no longer sees her/himself as knowing. She/he ceases to be aware of God's goodness and, no longer beholding God's goodness, no longer knows God to be good. There is a loss of Job-like faith. Now evil takes on evidential import against the goodness of God, and now a theodicy becomes something that is religiously relevant to her/his position. But now such a believer has ceased to be a Job-like believer.

The practical problem of evil

What would lead to the loss of Job-like faith or belief is not the recognition of evil per se, but the rising sense that God, if good, would not allow the evil one now confronts. It must be kept in mind that Job-like believers do not deny the existence of moral and natural evil. They may be acutely aware of it, and this means that they are in a position to recognize the practical problem of evil. Marilyn McCord Adams writes: 'Evil is a problem for everyone regardless of religious or philosophical orientation – the problem of how to cope in some way as to survive and, if possible, flourish (hence a practical problem), of how – despite all – to win lives filled with positive meaning (and so an existential problem).'[25] If the existential problem is how to find again meaning in our personal lives when we experience horrendous evil (Adams's central concern), the practical problem is how to address, mitigate, and prevent natural and moral evil in our lives and in the lives of others. Adams is of course right that evil is a problem – a practical problem – for everyone 'regardless of religious or philosophical orientation'. John Kekes, who rejects the religious idea 'that the scheme of things is good', addresses what he calls 'the secular problem of evil', which is simply 'the prevalence of evil'.[26] Often those who oppose and seek to mitigate the evils of the world address natural evils such as famine and the rampage of AIDS. One may think here of such non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as Oxfam and Doctors Without Borders. Sometimes the effort is to oppose moral evil, as with Amnesty International. There is, I think, informing all such efforts a sense that evil is objectively evil, that is, evil irrespective of individual judgement or cultural discernment. Certainly there are gross evils, ranging from famine to the sexual enslavement of children, that are recognized as evils nearly universally, even if there is not universal agreement on the subtler forms of psychological evil.

While Job in the epilogue of the Book of Job does not recognize the practical problem of evil and does not set himself to remedy and oppose evils in the world, this reaction to evil is hardly closed to Job-like believers. In fact, on religious and moral grounds, Job-like believers should recognize and address the practical problem of evil, although this does not say how evil is to be opposed or which evils are to be focused upon. Let me end by returning to Dostoyevsky's Alyosha and his reaction to evil. In most discussions of the problem of evil, if some part of *The Brothers Karamazov* is referred to, it is the chapter entitled 'Rebellion', in which Ivan catalogues evils done to children. I myself referred to it earlier. It is at the end of this chapter that Alyosha confesses to his brother that, if he were the architect of the world order, he would not found human happiness on the torture of a single child. In effect, Alyosha is rejecting that kind of theodicy that seeks a justification of suffering in the creation of a greater good. No better theodicy is offered by Alyosha or Dostoyevsky. The problem of evil, the theological problem, drops from view. However the practical problem of evil does not.

In book 10 of the novel Dostoyevsky introduces a number of schoolboys, prominent among whom is thirteen-year-old Kolya. Kolya is an only child, and his mother, a young widow, is overly protective. Kolya is taunted by the boys with being a mother's darling, and Kolya reacts with a kind of aloofness toward his mother, which causes her grief. At the same time he impresses his schoolfellows with a feat of derring-do – he lies down between the rails and lets a train pass over him. He thus gains the reputation of being a 'desperate character'[27] among the schoolboys, who now start to look up to him. As a part of his role, in the streets Kolya lies to and treats disrespectfully peasants and tradespeople. As a further part of his role, he nurtures a growing coldness toward his mother – with some lapses – and toward the other boys. When a younger student, Ilyusha, joins the school and seeks to attach himself to Kolya, Kolya responds with ever more coldness the more Ilyusha expresses fondness for him. Ilyusha comes to suffer greatly at the hands of the boys, once it is clear to them that he is not under Kolya's protection. Ilyusha's father is a drunkard, and the boys use this fact to taunt him. They get into fights, and Kolya does nothing. One day, after school, Ilyusha rushes at his tormentors and Kolya does nothing to prevent the fighting. He just stands and watches from a short distance. Ilyusha, in desperation, takes out his penknife and, rushing up to Kolya, stabs him in the thigh. Kolya, after the event, tells Alyosha about all this, and says he is sorry. He says that he is a 'sworn enemy of all sloppy sentiments' and that he wanted 'to train him [Ilyusha] to be a man'.[28]

Alyosha comes into the boys' lives because one of the boys has told him about Ilyusha.[29] Ilyusha has become ill, apparently with consumption, and though it is the time of Dmitry's trial, with which Alyosha is preoccupied, he goes regularly to visit Ilyusha. It is on such a visit that Alyosha meets Kolya. Alyosha's role with the boys is that of a mentor, especially for Kolya. In some ways Alyosha is, for the schoolboys, what a contemporary interactive role model is for today's urban gangs. However, there are differences. Alyosha needs to make no effort to keep Kolya and the other boys in school. The boys are not dropouts or in danger of dropping out. In fact Kolya loves to read. He has read Voltaire, and is proud to proclaim himself a socialist. In his notebooks for *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky refers to a variety of incidents that did not make their way into the novel: the torture of a four-year-old boy, the suicide of a small boy, a shot fired from a window, the theft by boys of money from a trunk.[30] If these actions had been included – depending on how they were developed – the boys, under Kolya's leadership, could have taken on more of the character of young criminals. As the novel is, however, the evils addressed are the psychological evils of coldness, vanity, and aloof pride, especially as found in Kolya. While some may not see these traits as evils, but rather as aspects of personal independence and strength (as Kolya tends to),[31] for Dostoyevsky these are certainly evils, evils of the soul or psychological evils. In Dostoyevsky's presentation, these elements affect even Kolya's expression of generosity.

Before Kolya met Alyosha he wanted to meet him, for there is something 'sympathetic and attractive' in the stories he has heard about Alyosha. In fact, though, Kolya is deeply ambivalent toward Alyosha. He has hitherto 'assumed an air of contemptuous indifference' when Alyosha was spoken of by the boys. He does not want to 'disgrace' himself. He wants to be friends with Alyosha but does not want to show how anxious he is to be his friend.[32] It is as though good and bad aspects of Kolya's soul were struggling with one another. Without putting too fine a point on it, Alyosha counteracts these psychological evils and encourages the goodness in Kolya's character, and in the character of the other boys. In the third and final chapter of the Epilogue – the very end of the novel – Alyosha speaks to the boys. The occasion of their gathering is the death of Ilyusha, who has succumbed to his consumptive condition. Alyosha does not speak of the evil of little Ilyusha dying of consumption, but of how he should be remembered as a good boy and as dear to them. 'Oh, how I loved him!' exclaims Kolya.[33] He has found in himself what before he would call a 'sloppy sentiment'. Alyosha does not name evil or speak to it; he interacts with and speaks to the boys – not with righteous denunciation, but with communicative love – and thereby mitigates evil.

Allowing that evils of the soul are evils, we may well feel that the evils that Alyosha remedies – the vanity and coldness of young boys – are not that serious, compared to the terrible suffering inflicted on children that Ivan brings forward. Another author might put his protagonist against a greater evil, as when Camus enlisted Rieux to oppose the plague. Rieux, of course, is not a religious believer in God, but one need not be a Rieux to oppose the natural and moral plagues of the world. A contemporary Alyosha might address the banal evils near to hand, or he might be active in Oxfam or Amnesty International, or be a hospital worker in Lambaréné or Calcutta. Yet, as he is in the novel, Alyosha *is* addressing the practical problem of evil and seeking to remedy evil as he finds it.

Alyosha does not react to the evil of the world by rejecting or defying God, as does his brother, or by holding his religious faith in abeyance until he can find an adequate theodicy. Alyosha has no theodicy to offer and, like Ivan, rejects a theodicy that would justify evils done to children by citing an ultimate good that requires such evils. In this sense Alyosha has no answer to the religious problem of evil, which he does not address. Yet he is aware of evil. He engages evil and seeks to lessen it in the lives of the boys he helps. Both Ivan and Alyosha, it is to be noted, react to the evil in the lives of children, but their reactions are utterly different. Ivan's reaction is to indict God. Alysosha's reaction is to help children themselves. Alyosha does so with a vigour of spirit equal to his brother's defiance. The religious problem of evil, then, he neither has nor addresses, even though he is invited to the problem by Ivan, while the practical problem of evil he both has and addresses. He addresses evil as an expression of his religious commitment to God and neighbour, and in answer to the moral and religious demands that apply to us all.[34] In this sense, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Alysoha transmutes the one problem of evil into the other.

Alyosha, we should allow, may or may not embody all the elements of Job-like belief. Dostoyevsky makes it clear that Father Zossima, Alyosha's religious mentor, has had the experience of beholding God's goodness in the world, but it is less clear that Alyosha has had such an experience.[35] What is clear is that Alyosha believes in God and accepts life in the world as good – and that he seeks to remedy evil as it confronts him. Following Alyosha, or the religious sensibility he expresses, with its appreciation of our moral and religious reposnsibility to stand up to evil, Job-like believers would face evil and seek to mitigate it. In doing so they would transmute the problem of evil that others have into the practical problem of evil.

Notes

1. J. L. Mackie 'Evil and omnipotence', and H. J. McCloskey 'God and evil', both reprinted in Nelson Pike (ed.) *God and Evil* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964). McCloskey allows that it is 'superfluous evil' that forces us to conclude that there cannot be an omnipotent, benevolent God.

2. A theodicy, as an effort to 'justify God's way to men', offers an answer to the traditional religious problem of evil: 'If God is all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing, why is there evil in the world?' Some, like McCloskey, would distinguish between the problem of physical, or natural, evil (natural evils being earthquakes, disease, and the like) and the problem of moral evil (moral evils being the morally wrong or evil things done by human beings). Any thoroughly adequate theodicy would have to account for both types of evil.

   In more recent discussions some, addressing the 'logical problem of evil', arising from the claim that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with God's existence (the claim made by Mackie and McCloskey), have offered a 'defence' designed to show that God could consistently allow evil, as Alvin Plantinga has done in *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 131ff. A theodicy tries to identify and argue for God's reason for evil, while a defence tries to identify a *possible* reason that God consistently could have for evil, thus showing that evil is compatible with God's existence; the same consideration, e.g. human free will, can be offered as a theodicy or as a defence.
3. All biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.
4. Nor of course does he try to establish a 'defence'.
5. John T. Wilcox calls this the 'orthodox' or 'traditional' view or doctrine in his *The Bitterness of Job* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 10–11.
6. Cf. Wesley Morriston 'God's answer to Job', *Religious Studies*, **32** (1996). On 340 he lists four 'mutually inconsistent propositions' that constitute 'the problem of Job'. They are:
   (1) God is making Job suffer.
   (2) A just God would not cause an innocent person [to] suffer as Job has suffered.
   (3) God is just.
   (4) Job is innocent of any wrong-doing serious enough to justify the punishment he has received.

   On my interpretation all four are true – if we make (2) read 'A just God would not cause an innocent person *to be punished as it appears Job is being punished*'. Notice how Morriston shifts from 'suffer' in (2) to 'punishment' in (4).
7. While the Psalms may have several authors, I will follow tradition and speak of 'the Psalmist' as their author. I have discussed the experience of God's presence as a discovery or beholding of God's presence, along with the epistemological issues that attend it, in my *The Cognitivity of Religion: Three Perspectives* (London: Macmillan, and Berkeley and Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 1985), 104ff.
8. H. H. Farmer *The World and God*, 2nd edn (London: James Nisbet and Co. Ltd; New York NY: Harper and Row, 1936), 118 of ch. 7. Pages 107–127 of ch. 7 are repr. in John Hick (ed.) *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 352.
9. Julian of Norwich *Showings* (long text) in Edmund Colledge, OSA and James Walsh, SJ (tr. and eds) *Julian of Norwich: Showings* (New York NY: Ramsey, and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1978), 300–301.
10. Eleonore Stump 'The mirror of evil', in Thomas V. Morris (ed.) *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason* (New York NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 242, 246, n. 10.
11. Julian of Norwich *Showings* (long text), 225; Psalms 128.2.
12. Stump 'The mirror of evil', 239.
13. Marilyn McCord Adams *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 26.
14. *Ibid.*, 54.
15. *Ibid.*, 149.
16. *Ibid.*, 189, 148, 149 (Adams's emphasis), and 156.
17. Wilcox *The Bitterness of Job*, 212, 217.
18. Morriston says, 'The book of Job moves back and forth between these two poles: between the idea of a God who cares about the doings of particular men like Job, and the idea of a God who is almost too big, too mysterious, too wholly other, for anything like that to make sense', 'God's answer to Job', 356. Morriston suggests that the Book of Job does not perfectly reconcile these two poles. Wilcox in effect rejects the first for the second.
19. Fyoder Dostoyevsky *The Brothers Karamazov*, bk 5, ch. 4 'Rebellion'; David Magarshack (tr.) *The Brothers Karamazov* (Baltimore MD: Penguin Books, 1958), vol. 1, 287–288. 'Rebellion' is reprinted in Pike *God and Evil*, see 16.

20. Adams *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 54. Others have appreciated that a proposed morally sufficient reason, given to God by a theodicy to justify such evils as those presented by Ivan Karamazov, would register on our moral sense as repugnant and insensitive. See Stewart R. Sutherland *God, Jesus and Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 23–25, and D. Z. Phillips 'The problem of evil', in Stuart C. Brown (ed.) *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 115–116. Peter Byrne cites Phillips and Sutherland and critically discusses their views in his *The Moral Interpretation of Religion* (Grand Rapids MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 139–148.
21. Nelson Pike 'Hume on evil', reprinted in *idem God and Evil*, 102.
22. I will leave to one side the position of Aquinas that faith itself gives us a kind of knowledge: *ST*, II–II q. 2, a. 4.
23. Stump 'The mirror of evil', 242.
24. In 'The mirror of evil', Stump, it seems to me, is close to the religious sensibility of Job-like belief. Elsewhere she has defended a theodicy offered by Aquinas, that pain and suffering can lead to the greatest spiritual benefit and happiness, to be united with God in heaven: 'Aquinas on the sufferings of Job' in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.) *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1996). The proto-theodicy that Stump offers in 'The mirror of evil', to which I referred earlier, is essentially a form of Aquinas' theodicy with unspecified spiritual benefits.

    In a more recent article Stump develops the category of second-person experience: 'Second-person accounts and the problem of evil' in Tommi Lehtonen and Timo Koistinen (eds) *Perspectives in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2000). In second-person experience 'you interact consciously and directly with another person' (90). In an example she uses, a sick child, 'who has a shared history of loving relations with his mother [may] know that she allows him to suffer only because she loves him. But an outsider [with] no relation to her may well want to know what the connection between the suffering and the child's well-being is, before he is willing to grant that the mother is justified in allowing the child to suffer' (112). Stump in this article keeps in place her proto-theodicy (or, here, a theodicy). Setting that aside, in this article too she draws our attention to the religious significance of an experience of God's goodness. However, for her, the experience of Job that is relevant is his face-to-face conversation with God at the end of the Book of Job. The experience that I find internal to a Job-like believer's self-understanding is an experience of God's goodness in God's creation, in accord with the sensibility of the Psalms, that Job, understood as a Job-like believer, would have had before the prologue.
25. Adams *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 181.
26. John Kekes *Facing Evil* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 4.
27. Dostoyevsky *The Brothers Karamazov*, bk 10, ch. 1; *The Brothers Karamazov*, David Magarshack (tr.), vol. 2, 606.
28. *Ibid.*, bk 10, ch. 4; *The Brothers Karamazov*, David Magarshack (tr.), vol. 2, 626.
29. *Ibid.*, bk 10, ch. 3; *The Brothers Karamazov*, David Magarshack (tr.), vol. 2, 615.
30. *The Notebooks for* The Brothers Karamazov, Edward Wasiolek (ed. and tr.) (Chicago IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 183.
31. Dostoyevsky *The Brothers Karamazov*, bk 10, ch. 4; *The Brothers Karamazov*, David Magarshack (tr.), vol. 2, 623.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, 912.
34. The general moral obligations to prevent harm where we can and to do good where we can are widely recognized, and of course the religious obligation to love our neighbours is recognized by Christian believers, Job-like or not.
35. Zossima's experience, had when he was a young man, is recalled by him in *The Brothers Karamazov*, bk 6, ch. 2; *The Brothers Karamazov*, David Magarshack (tr.), vol. 1, 352. Alysoha's rapturous experience beneath the starry heavens the night he leaves the cell in which Father Zossima's coffin lay is, it seems, unclear in this regard; *The Brothers Karamazov*, bk 7, ch. 4; *The Brothers Karamazov*, David Magarshack (tr.), vol. 2, 426–427.