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Redeeming the past

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Abstract. I take up Richard Swinburne's point, in his *Responsibility and Atonement*, Ch. 5, that although the past cannot be changed, wrongdoers may change its significance by 'disowning' their actions through atonement, just as their victims may do so through forgiveness. I argue that the point can and should be pressed much more strongly than it is by Swinburne within the terms of his own discussion; and that it has a much wider significance, transcending that discussion, for there is a constant interplay between events, human actions, and our retrospective assessment of the past. Finally, I look tentatively at the question in an eschatological perspective.

Writers as diverse as Richard Swinburne, William Temple, Elizabeth Templeton, and Jean-Paul Sartre[1] have made the point that, although what is past is past (and so 'it's no use crying over spilt milk'), nevertheless we can not only modify the effects of past happenings but also seek to change their significance retrospectively. In this paper I shall begin by considering one of these writers, Richard Swinburne, who, in Chapter 5 of his book *Responsibility and Atonement* [2] argues that although the past cannot be changed, someone who has committed an offence can disown it through forgiveness. I shall argue: (1) that the point can and should be pressed much more strongly than it is by Swinburne within the terms of his own discussion; and (2) that it has a much wider significance, transcending the context of that discussion; then (3) I shall explore the point more tentatively with reference to eschatology.

swinburne's case

Swinburne makes the common-sense point that wrong-doers should seek to remove as much of the consequences of their past acts as they can by restoring the *status quo* when possible, e.g. by returning a stolen watch, and by recompensing their victims (pp. 81–2); this is part of what is involved in atonement, which Swinburne analyses in terms of four things: repentance, apology, reparation and penance (the last of these being a performative act disowning the wrong act, over and above the reparation that is due). But besides the harmful consequences of actions we need also, he says, to consider the attitudes and status of wrongdoers: through their actions they have made themselves into people who have harmed their victims. Now they cannot

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. Barnes (London, 1958), pp. 478–8, 538–40. References to the works of the other three writers mentioned will be given later.

[2] Oxford, 1989.

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change past facts. But they can at least wish that they had not done what they have done (p. 78); and they can distance themselves from their actions by disowning them, i.e. by repenting and by giving public expression of this in apologies (p. 82). The effect of the latter is, he says, to 'make the present "he" in his attitude as different as possible from the past "he" who did the act; that is the most he can do towards undoing the act' (p. 83). Conversely, the victim can accept the wrongdoer's apology and so forth by forgiveness, which Swinburne construes in terms of the victim disregarding the offence by not treating the wrongdoer in future as the originator of the harmful act (p. 85). Thus the transaction, which issues in the removal of guilt, involves a disowning of the original action by both parties: the wrongdoer disowns it, and so renounces his or her status as offender, by atoning for it through repentance, apology, reparation and penance, and the victim does so through forgiveness (p. 87). Of course, the victim may forgive anyway, regardless of the wrongdoer's attitude: but Swinburne is inclined to label this as condonation rather than forgiveness, and sees it as a failure to take the wrongdoer seriously (p. 86).

Swinburne's discussion in this chapter is wide-ranging; but I want to concentrate now simply on what he says about attitudes to the past. First of all, I am uneasy about his use of the term 'disown', on which his discussion centres here. Strictly speaking, a *victim* cannot disown a harmful act – it is not his or her act in the first place! I take it that Swinburne means that the victim renounces any moral claims deriving from being the victim of a wrongful act, for he says that the victim accepts the offender's disowning and thereby undertakes not to treat the latter as an offender (p. 85). But can the *wrongdoer* disown the action? Surely, if we believe in freedom and responsibility, we can never exactly disown what we have done deliberately? Children who have misbehaved are told, rather, to 'own up' But, again, it is clear what Swinburne means: as his earlier words indicate, he is concerned with our distancing ourselves from our past, wrongful, and regretted actions. My real objection now, however, is that even if the term 'disown' makes sense here, it is too weak for what is at stake. Hence I prefer the term 'redeem', used in my title. Disowning is a negative relationship, on a par with disregarding; whereas redeeming may indicate something more positive. (The term is metaphorical and, as used today is of course rich in Christian theological associations; but these in turn have been moulded by earlier uses, e.g. with regard to the freeing of slaves in the ancient world.)

I think that this more positive conception involves two ideas: (i) something is salvaged from the past, in that the evil effects of what has been done are removed or mitigated, and possibly some good is brought out of it; (ii) the evil done is somehow put into a wider context, so that our view of it changes: although we cannot change past facts we can change their significance, as Swinburne's discussion indicates, within its limits. My two ideas are linked,

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in that it is we who can to some extent construct the new context: for our actions now and in future change the significance of past facts, so that we, as it were, cast a good light on the past, or repaint the picture.

The first idea, of remedying past ills, extends to a great deal of human life, in virtue of our ability to alter the effects of the past, to some extent. We devote much effort to discerning the evil effects of past happenings and actions, to preventing or mitigating them as far as we can now, and to initiating other causal chains which may offset them in future. Doctors, mechanics, agronomists, mountain-rescue teams, and those who have to anticipate (if possible) and deal with the consequences of floods, fires and earthquakes, to mention only a few examples, do this in different ways. Swinburne is concerned with the limited case of deliberate human actions which cause harm to others. But even here wrongdoers may do more than disown their actions in the way Swinburne describes, for they may also achieve a deeper repentance and reconciliation by learning from their faults and mistakes and trying to bring good out of evil, e.g. by dedicating themselves to other victims of similar crimes and mishaps. Slave-owners, for instance, realizing their injustice and inhumanity, might not only free their own slaves and offer them compensation, but also devote efforts to anti-slavery campaigns for the rest of their lives; or torturers might not only renounce their trade and try to atone for what they have done to their victims, but might also campaign for the abolition of torture everywhere and for the alleviation of the suffering of its victims. In Swinburne's terms, such examples would come under 'penance': but he construes this narrowly, in terms of the wrongdoer expressing repentance by giving the victim something over and above the compensation which is due, e.g. if someone who has damaged a rusty bumper gives a new one, rather than restoring the old one, and a box of chocolates as well (p. 156). But clearly the examples I myself suggested earlier, though still cases of penance, envisage a form of expiation which goes a long way beyond merely doing justice to those directly affected by one's actions. I think that the phrase 'redeeming the past' conveys something of such a wider concept of atonement, which envisages a real 'cleansing of the heart' and a thorough change of attitudes and relationships.

The second idea involved in what I call redeeming the past is that of our changing the significance of the past. Swinburne's discussion is valuable in indicating that some human practices, like apologizing, making reparation, and forgiving, attempt to do this. His treatment, however, is marred by his selection of examples, many of which are either trivial or fantastic: giving someone a bunch of flowers, chocolates, or even an elephant; or gladly going off to a party with someone who has just murdered your beloved wife (pp. 84–6). But what of fidelity in marriage or loyalty in a deep relationship of love and friendship? Often the smaller wrongs done here stem from faults and limitations of character, which are not likely to be removed. Hence,

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unfortunately, their effects are likely to continue, so that they cannot exactly be disregarded or disowned. But neither should they simply be accepted, if we take the term 'acceptance' in a weak, passive, sense, of mere acquiescence or resignation – which we do not have to do, for there are other, stronger senses of the term.[3] The acceptance has to involve understanding on both sides and to be part of a wider picture, in which we look at the relationship over time, and see whether it does indeed develop and flourish, despite the flaws of the partners. As regards more serious wrongs, like adultery or betrayal, it is difficult to see how, on Swinburne's account, a genuine relationship could survive them, for what compensation could ever be given for such disruptions of a relationship? And indeed the common occurrence of taking revenge through maiming, murder and so on in such cases might suggest that this is so, and that punishment or retribution are the only possible human response. Yet sometimes reconciliations are achieved: an unfaithful lover may repent and succeed in restoring a relationship through a new and richer kind of love – illustrating the common saying that love is redemptive. But they are rare and very costly for all parties, in terms of both repentance and forgiveness. And, again, the past evil cannot simply be 'disowned', for the realization of what has happened must become part of the reconciliation and of the ensuing development of a deeper relationship; the good must relate to the evil, at least in that the partners have learned from it and thereby matured. So the picture of the past must be, as it were, repainted, by changing the significance of what has happened; which, in turn, is done by reconstructing its context by developing a different kind of present and future.

In the cases of adultery and betrayal we are dealing with the seeming breakdown of an existing relationship, and the possibility of restoring it. Here there is already some basis for a reconciliation. But let us consider offences which seem so bad that not only can no compensation be given but we cannot conceive how those concerned could ever achieve reconciliation and forgiveness after coming to terms with the past. Dostoevsky's famous example in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bk. 5, Ch. 4, based on an actual event, of the landowner who set his pack of dogs on a child who had injured one of them slightly, so that the child was torn to pieces in front of his mother, is a case in point. Among other things, Ivan Karamazov asserts that even if 'eternal harmony' can be brought about only through human suffering, the tears of the child would remain unexpiated; hence the mother would still have no right to forgive her child's torturer. This is surely so. But what of the landowner? 'Disowning' his action or giving adequate recompense seem to be out of the question here. If, however, he were to change his life completely by freeing his serfs, giving away all his wealth, and devoting the rest of his life to the loving service of the poor, we might perhaps say that he had done

[3] See Sophie Botros, 'Acceptance and Morality', *Philosophy* **58** (1983), pp. 433–53, here.

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something (though perhaps very little) to redeem his action. Again, it would be a matter of viewing his crime in the context of his whole life, seeing what he had learned from it, how deep his repentance was, and how he had sought to atone for it, and judging whether there had indeed been a real change of heart issuing in true charity.

REDEEMING THE PAST

The topic which I have discussed has, I think, a deeper significance than I have conveyed so far, for it is not only with regard to atonement that the issue of 'revisioning' the past arises. Later events, not just our own and other people's actions, often seem to show up the past in a different light and lead us to re-assess what has happened. At a trivial level, people may speak of good fortune redeeming past misfortunes, meaning merely that one compensates for the other. But more seriously, we often re-assess our education, relationships, and career-patterns, as well as mishaps and other seemingly fortuitous events. This is because the longer we live, the more things we have to relate to each other in our personal histories, and therefore the more possibilities of discerning new patterns; or, to use an analogy less passive in its connotations, the more strands we have to weave into the pattern.

The analogy I have just mentioned, like that of a picture used earlier, is one sometimes used in theological contexts. J. R. Lucas gives the analogy of Persian rug-makers who let their children help them and who can incorporate the children's mistakes into a revised design, to make the point that God, although (according to Lucas) He does not foreknow our free actions, can weave our sins and errors into His plan.[4] And of course theodicists often say that we do not see the whole picture in this life; or, more boldly, they appeal to the '*O felix culpa*' claim – that the misfortune of Adam's sin led to the unsurpassable expression of love seen in the Incarnation and Redemption; or that the evils suffered now may be 'defeated' (Roderick Chisholm's term, which he distinguishes from 'balancing off', i.e. merely compensating for[5]) in this life or eschatologically. Theology also raises the question of whether a third party can atone for the sins of others, even those of the whole human race (a question raised by Alyosha Karamazov, with reference to the Cross, in his reply to Ivan). I shall return to some of these questions in the third part of my paper.

An obvious example, given by Elizabeth Templeton in her essay 'Undoing the Past',[6] of a very different kind of re-assessment of the past, with a practical purpose, is to be found in the practice of psycho-analysis: the person being analysed seeks to relive the past, with a view to achieving a deeper

[4] J. R. Lucas, *Freedom and Grace* (London, 1976), p. 39.

[5] Roderick M.Chisholm, 'The Defeat of Good and Evil', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* **42** (1968–69), pp. 21–38.

[6] In her *The Strangeness of God* (London, 1993), pp. 43–60.

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understanding of it and thereby shaking off some of its burdens, so as to be able to fashion a more open and creative future. This practice finds an analogue in some works of literature in which writers re-evaluate their past lives: most obviously in autobiographies like St Augustine's *Confessions*, but also in works like Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* or D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. Such writers have different ends in view in their recovery and analysis of their past. Proust found his vocation as a writer in recovering the past from his unconscious, and thereby overcoming the disintegrative and transformative action of time; whilst St Augustine sought, among other things, to discern and to convey how God's grace and providence had worked through his life, especially during the years preceding his conversion.

The recalling and re-assessment of the past found both in writers like St Augustine and in psycho-analysis is not simply a matter of coming to a new perception of the past. Historians may do this, as an end in itself; but our concern now is with the ways in which people learn from their own past, perhaps coming to a deeper understanding through this, and then fashion, as far as they can, a new kind of future. And, in turn, the nature of this future may occasion a further re-evaluation of the past – both the remote and the more recent past. We seem to be confronted with the possibility of a kind of continuous sequence of: living – evaluating and restructuring our lives – living – re-evaluating and restructuring, and so on, with an interplay between events, our actions and how we reinterpret the past. As Kierkegaard said, we live life forwards but understand it backwards.

Of course, someone else may see what is happening in my life better than I can. But unless such knowledge is passed on to me, or I somehow cotton on to what is happening, I am not going to set about refashioning my future in the way suggested Another obvious consideration is that one can also learn from other people's past, from actions they have performed, especially those of some normative moral or religious figure.

Such a sequence, as I have delineated it so far, is progressive: it seems, therefore, like my earlier discussion, with its talk of possibilities of reconciliation, to reflect an optimistic view of life. But of course we must also reckon with the possibility that the significance of the past can be changed for the worse. An adultery or a betrayal may cast a sulphurous light on the years preceding it, revealing the shallowness or the fragility of a relationship, either because people find anticipations in the remoter past of what has happened, or because their whole retrospective judgement of events changes, or for both these reasons. In Hilary Mantel's novel *A Change of Climate* a wife reflects, after having learned of her husband's infidelity, 'It is in the nature of betrayal, she thought, that it not only changes the present, but that it reaches back with its dirty hands and changes the past'.[7] Thus things can go the other way; and indeed, more generally, later re-evaluations can go in diverse

[7] Hilary Mantel, *A Change of Climate* (Harmondsworth 1995), p. 304.

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directions. Augustine did not seriously revise the perspective on his own life that he expressed in his *Confessions* (which he wrote about half-way through his life, in his early forties). But a disappointed subject of psycho-analysis might lose his or her initial optimism and decide that, after all, the burdens of the past cannot really be shifted and that all one can do is to make the best of a bad job ('If life gives you lemons, make lemonade', as one put it to me. Even that realization, I suppose, shows some progress!).

Still, my discussion so far does not require us to make any grand claims about the direction of human life. I have simply suggested that in so far as we can reinterpret the past, change its significance through practices like reparation and forgiveness, and make a fruitful use of it by coming to a deeper understanding of it, learning lessons from it and atoning for evils done, the phrase 'redeeming the past' seems an apt one. It is not always good advice to forget the past. But what if we do put things in a wider perspective, by considering the possibility of an afterlife?

ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Let me go on now, in the third part of this paper, to widen the discussion still further by looking, very tentatively, at the topic in an eschatological perspective. I have mentioned two ideas which seem to me to be involved in redeeming the past, namely acting so as to remove or mitigate the effects of past evils, possibly by bringing some good out of them, and putting past evils into a wider context (or 'picture' or 'weave'); and I have argued that the two ideas are interconnected. Clearly, if we entertain the supposition of an afterlife, the range of possibilities of redemption is increased greatly. For in such a life there might be more opportunities for actions, whether by human beings, God, or other beings, like angels, and for further happenings, thereby vastly extending the picture or weave which incorporates them. Let me look at the latter idea first.

In the *Showings* of the mediaeval mystic Julian of Norwich we are told that part of the bliss and fulfilment of those who are saved will be that, at the Last Day, they will see the true reason why God has done all the things He has, and the reason, too, for all those things which He has permitted.[8] This is one example of a very common line of thought ('*then* we'll see'), which Gabriel Daly calls 'meaning deferred'.[9] In recent times it has received its most familiar exposition (when applied to the afterlife) in the work of John Hick. In the penultimate chapter of *Evil and the God of Love* he says that the eschatological solution to the problem of evil which he has advocated does not involve regarding a putative future life as a compensation for our suffering in this life, but rather as an unending 'common good', which is seen

[8] Longer Text, Ch. 75.
[9] Gabriel Daly, *Creation and Redemption* (Wilmington DE, 1989), p. 152.

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by its participants as justifying all that has been endured on the way to it.[10] How? Hick leaves it as something of a mystery. Either, he suggests, the scars and memories of suffering are transfigured in the light of universal and mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, or, with so many new, transforming experiences, 'the memory of our earthly life is dimmed to extinction.'[11] Later in the chapter he affirms his faith that God *is* bringing future good out of present evil,[12] but does not, I think, do much more to elaborate his solution. In another book, *Death and Eternal Life*, as we shall see, he envisages spiritual progress and transformation as continuing in a series of reincarnations, but I do not think that this hypothesis, as Hick presents it, adds anything in principle to his solution. (He omits, in his version of reincarnation, to bring in the doctrine of *karma* and to consider the idea that our present sufferings are the result of sins in past lives.[13])

Other writers resort to analogies, often drawn from the arts. William Temple, for example, in a brief but interesting discussion in his *Mens Creatrix*, gives the analogy of a play, the meaning of which is not apparent until the last act is over; from which he draws the general principle, 'The value ... of any event in time is not fixed until the series of which it is a member is over, perhaps, therefore, not to all eternity'. Thus, he says, past events may be revalued because they 'may become the occasions of some spiritual state of great value, which could not have been reached without them.'[14] (Temple thinks, anyway, that for purposive beings like ourselves explanation is to be sought more in a system of ends than in one of causes.)[15] Elizabeth Templeton gives an analogy from music: the second playing of a theme exerts a kind of retrospective pull on the listener, so that: 'Hearing the recapitulation, you hear what you heard before, but your before-hearing is modified by your after-hearing'.[16] (Actually, I think that she should have said that our *memory* of the before-hearing is modified.) She notes that the term 'recapitulation' played a crucial role in St Irenaeus' theology of redemption, though of course without its musical connotations. For Irenaeus time is redeemed because the history of Adam is repeated or recapitulated in Christ, the Second Adam, but with a very different outcome. More generally, Templeton goes on to say that 'the past is therefore for God never fixed, since it is always liable to reopening in the new context of the eschatological future which he offers the world ...'.[17]

What seems to be envisaged by some of these writers is that in eternity there is a refocussing or 'revisioning' of the past whereby we shall see our histories in a new light – see them, perhaps, as God perceives them, through

[10] John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (2nd edn., London, 1985), p. 341.
[11] *Ibid.* pp. 350–1.
[12] *Ibid.* pp. 360–1.
[13] I owe this point to Professor K. S. Ramakrishna Rao. Hick allows only for a later purification in other worlds in other 'spaces', but not for previous lives in this world.
[14] William Temple, *Mens Creatrix* (London, 1917), p. 173.
[15] *Ibid.* p. 174.
[16] Elizabeth Templeton, *op. cit.* p. 47.
[17] *Ibid.* p. 55.

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participating in His wisdom. This new seeing involves perceiving a relationship between the whole series of events and thereby being led to change our views of the significance of the past.

But what is the series of events being considered here? One might simply say that after death we see in eternity our lives as a whole (and perhaps all of history), as Julian of Norwich suggests, and perceive a new significance, and leave it at that. But some religious thinkers and some religions regard the series as continuing somehow after death. This belief requires us to look at the other half of the question, that is, the role of new actions and events in changing the significance of the series. What can we, or God, do to change the significance of the past?

I am ignoring actions done in this world by subsequent generations of human beings, not just because I am now discussing eschatology, but because we are faced by a question which troubled Walter Benjamin and so many others earlier in this century (anticipated by Dostoevsky): even if a reign of peace, justice and happiness were to emerge on this earth, how would this redeem the suffering of past generations? Without an answer to that question, those generations are no more than the waste-products of history.[18]

So let us ask first about actions done by human beings in a putative afterlife. Swinburne thinks that some crimes, e.g. those of the Nazis, may be too great to be atoned for in a few years of earthly life, but that if there is an afterlife in which they can confront their victims, they may be able to make adequate atonement to them there (p. 89). It should be noted that he says this in Ch. 5 of his book, the same chapter I discussed in the first part of this paper, which is a purely philosophical chapter. I take it that in raising the possibility of a confrontation between wrongdoers and their victims in the afterlife, he is envisaging that this will result in forgiveness and ultimate reconciliation. Later on in the book Swinburne moves on to some related theological matters: in discussing the Redemption he says that although Christ atoned for our sins we have to formally associate ourselves with his work, through repentance (p. 161); and in the final chapter, 'Heaven and Hell', he says that some sort of intermediate state like Purgatory is appropriate to those who die with imperfect or unsettled characters, for further reform of character (pp. 196–8; cf. pp. 131–2).

Mention of Purgatory perhaps suggests to us punishment, but the word means primarily purification. Now the idea of purification in an afterlife is not restricted to some Christian churches, but is also found in many of the world's religions and in some individual thinkers. Sometimes it is envisaged as an endless process: thus the nineteenth-century Marburg neo-Kantian, Hermann Cohen, following Kant's line of thought about immortality in the second *Critique*, wrote of holiness or self-purification being an 'infinite task'; he says:

[18] See J. B. Metz, *Faith in History and Society* (London, 1980), Chs. 6–7.

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The holiness of man consists in self-sanctification, which, however, can have no termination, therefore cannot be a permanent rest, but only infinite striving and becoming.[19]

If the process is envisaged as everlasting, this would have certain implications for our enquiry: presumably new interpretations could always arise because the series of events would never be complete, and so we would never get the complete picture. It also raises more obvious questions about what kinds of life and actions are envisaged by Cohen, and whether or how they might change the effects and significance of actions done in this life.

More commonly, however, purification is regarded as a limited phase: traditional treatments of Purgatory usually described this in terms of punishment, whilst more modern discussions of an intermediate state (not necessarily specifically of Purgatory) speak rather of healing or learning. John Hick, in his *Death and Eternal Life*, as I have already noted, spins out this state into a series of reincarnations in other 'spaces', during which we are gradually perfected by the work of the divine psycho-therapist (Hick's own analogy); though in the end-state we are probably not embodied and probably not in time.[20] Like some of Hick's critics, I am not sure that this complicated hypothesis of a multiplicity of future lives has any advantages over the simpler hypothesis of a single span with several phases [21] (not to mention other difficulties about time and eternity, identity, the nature of the lives envisaged, and about God's action in these other worlds). On the other hand, I sympathize with Hick's stress on a process of purification, and I think that he makes a telling point in his discussion of *The Brothers Karamazov* when he says that although we cannot expect the child's mother to forgive the landowner as he was, however in the process of soul-making which Hick envisages he might become a 'new creature' whom the mother could accept.[22] Alyosha would, I think, need to add this point to what he said about the Cross, in order to explain how the mother might join her own forgiveness to that of Christ. But also, I think, the mother and the child would have to discern some kind of meaning in the process in the way that Julian of Norwich suggests (Dostoevsky had already realized that it would be insufficient to merely envisage them as receiving compensation in the afterlife, since this would evade the issues of justice and atonement).

Finally, let us ask about God's actions. I take it that he cannot actually 'undo' the past literally, for this involves a contradiction: it cannot be the case that the crimes and sufferings of Auschwitz both happened and did not happen. Apart from that, however, it would seem that, on a traditional account of theism, His infinite wisdom and knowledge entail that He can

[19] Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. S. Kaplan (New York, 1972), p. 111; cf. pp. 303–5.

[20] John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London, 1976), Ch. 22, especially pp. 463–4. For a more recent discussion, see his *Disputed Questions* (London, 1993), Ch. 11.

[21] Terence Penelhum, review of *Death and Eternal Life*, in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* **9** (1979), p. 160.

[22] John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, p. 165.

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survey the whole of time and see the interconnectedness and significance of events, His unlimited goodness entails that He wills the good of all and wants, therefore, to bring good out of evil, and His omnipotence means that He can carry out what He wills. But how does He bring good out of evil, and can He always do so? Or are some people or situations irredeemable? In principle, I have already answered this question in terms of the two aspects of redeeming the past already noted, i.e. performing further actions, and doing so in such a way as to change the significance of the past by putting it in a different context or perspective. Now if God can always give us a new present and a new future, then presumably He can always thereby change the significance of past events. More specifically, however, from our previous discussion it would seem that two conditions would have to be fulfilled in order for us to regard a new pattern of events as redemptive:

(i) An adequate atonement would have to be made, in this world or the next, for wrongdoing, resulting in the forgiveness of offenders by their victims and in reconciliation between them. This condition would depend on the free response, of repentance, of wrongdoers.

(ii) We would need to see the meaning, in terms of the goodness of God, of our sufferings, both those brought about by other people and those occasioned by natural causes, and thereby have our bad memories healed or assuaged. Writers on the problem of evil often argue that there are sometimes internal connections between evils and goods, such that the latter can only come about through the former; they give examples like the relationship between courage and danger or hardship, or that between generosity and need. This is a familiar line in theodicy, seen in the passage I quoted from *Mens Creatrix* in which Temple writes of our reassessing past events when we realize that they may become the occasions of some spiritual state of great value which could not have been reached without them, and also found in more recent writers like Hick and Swinburne. In terms of eschatology, we would be envisaging a situation in which people would see such connections in the case of all their sufferings, realize that the goods brought out of them by God could not have been brought about in any less painful way without violating our freedom, and would feel that the whole process is worthwhile and justifiable.

I say that these are two conditions which would have to be fulfilled in any envisaged eschatological redemption of the past. To go any further here in assessing to what extent these conditions can be, or might have been, fulfilled, we would have to move on and look at two currently very lively areas of theology on which I have touched from time to time, namely theology of the Atonement and theodicy. Here, I think the philosopher can only offer a kind of 'prolegomena to any future eschatology', by suggesting what might constitute adequate conditions, and not speculate more than I have done about their actual fulfilment. So here I take my leave.

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