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[Essay]

Life's Perennial Problems

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Abstract

This essay explores differing conceptions of life's problems and the resources brought to bear in coping with such difficulties. I consider three paradigmatic conceptions: the problem of evil (in the West), the problem of ignorance/suffering (in the East), and the problem of affliction. I briefly outline these "perennial" problems from a soteriological point of view. The final sections of the paper consider the most serious of life's difficulties, and draw some speculative implications from this perspective.

INTRODUCTION

In a previous essay (Takaki 2016b), three philosophical approaches to life were outlined: philosophies of living well, philosophies of living, and philosophies of being. I argued that in the face of life's myriad difficulties, philosophies of being offer the most robust life-project. To summarize, philosophies of living well require the intersection of various intricate goods that make possible a life of ornate, yet fragile, beauty. Philosophies of living require more durable materials for construction less subject to the fragilities of the former's sophisticated cosmopolitanism. But beyond each of these "polis-related" brethren, philosophies of being thrive even in solitary exposure to the elements, and are at home in the cosmos with all its contingencies. What were called life's *perennial problems* suggests why philosophies of being offer the most robust of responses to life's difficulties. More generally, it is only against a backdrop of the innumerable difficulties of living that all three life-projects make any sense in the first place—the question of how one ought to live and the philosophical projects exploring this question are funded by the relentlessness of life's hardships.

But just what are these perennial problems, and how are they enriched and informed by a cross-cultural perspective? This essay explores differing

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conceptions of life's problems while uncovering largely congruent presuppositions about the difficulties of living. I consider three paradigmatic conceptions: the problem of evil (in the West), the problem of ignorance/suffering (in the East), and the problem of affliction. I briefly outline these complex and tradition-rich problems from a soteriological point of view. The final sections of the paper consider the most serious of life's difficulties, and draw some speculative implications from this perspective.

PROBLEM OF EVIL

In the West, largely informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition, the problem of evil reflects life's hardships. When such hardships are viewed in the abstract, the problem highlights the tension between the existence of evil and the goodness and omnipotence of God. Thus J.L. Mackie writes, if "you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limitations to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you" (Mackie 1990, 26). Let us call this the *theoretical problem of evil* (TPE), which has correspondingly elicited many responses utilizing a variety of resources (e.g., Plantinga's deployment of modal logic, process philosophy's appropriation of Whitehead's metaphysics, etc.). Beyond the confines of the TPE, Nelson Pike observes that evil

> in the world has central negative importance for theology only when theology is approached as a quasi-scientific object …. Within most theological positions, the existence of God is taken as an item of faith or embraced as an *a priori* argument … [and thus from this standpoint] the traditional problem of evil reduces to a noncrucial perplexity of relatively minor importance. (Pike 1990, 52)

In brief, the TPE differs from what might be called the *lived problem of evil*, with its crucial personalistic dimensions.

While these two problems overlap, the lived problem of evil remains entrenched regardless of the metaphysical status of the TPE. To illustrate with a (in)famous psychology experiment exhibiting a gap between theory and action (the *Good Samaritan Study* conducted by John Darley and Daniel Batson), a

group of seminary students were tasked with preparing a lecture on the Good Samaritan, and were either prompted to hurry along to the next class or not. Placed along the route to the following class was a stranger in need; the study found that only 10% of the first group stopped to help, compared to 63% in the second group. One interpretation of the study is that slowing down can help to bridge the gap between theory and action (or between information that is processed by our higher-order cognitive systems regarding norms, and information present in our environment to which we ought to pay more attention). Putting aside what exactly can be safely concluded from the experiment (since 63% still seems rather short of meaningful significance given the kind of population under consideration), it illustrates the more general divide between the lived problem of evil and its theoretical counterpart. For undertaking a careful study of the TPE may not assist in dealing with the complexities of the lived problem (*a fortiori,* such theoretical study can enable further distance from life's actual difficulties, even exacerbating them).

The lived problem of evil begins with the recognition that suffering is entwined with life, and that there are very few people (if any) who don't encounter some form of significant suffering through the course of their lives. By contrast, the TPE steps back from life's playing field and views suffering as a puzzle to be solved. Indeed, Diogenes Allen writes:

> Philosophic discussions of the problem of evil often treat suffering only as evidence that runs counter to a theistic world view. If we regard suffering only as counter-evidence, as did Hume, then we are unlikely to learn from suffering. Our egocentricity will remain intact. We then will judge the world without humility and thus be unable to see that it is praiseworthy despite the adversity it brings to us and other creatures. (Allen 1990, 195)

If egocentricity obscures our relation to suffering and finding our place in the cosmos, it is perhaps because most crucially the TPE doesn't start with lived suffering and what it can disclose from a spiritual and personalistic point of view. In other words, viewing suffering from a soteriological perspective significantly shifts where the TPE "ends," as it were, and where the lived problem of evil begins.

Thus far I have been using *suffering* and *evil* interchangeably. But are they

the same? While there are "lesser" evils that are just forms of suffering, there are also what Marilyn McCord Adams (1990) calls *horrendous evils*, for which the word *suffering* appears inept. On this semblance, the lived problem of evil would be synonymous with kinds of (lesser) suffering. However, taking a broader comparative stance, suffering encompasses horrendous evils and even deeper existential phenomena (see footnote 4). The next section covers this second sort of perennial life problem, the problem of suffering/ignorance. The third perennial life problem, the problem of affliction, will synthesize the relations between suffering and evil, and offer an understanding of the deepest type of life-problem.

PROBLEM OF SUFFERING/IGNORANCE

While suffering is distinguishable from ignorance, from an Eastern perspective these terms broadly connote the same problem. In Buddhism specifically, and Indian philosophy more generally, *duhkha* and *avidya* (ignorance) are the root-notions that motivate various soteriological philosophies. *Duhkha* is often translated as *suffering*, but a better translation of this rich term would be "frustration, since suffering often has physical connotations, and, in addition to referring to physical pain, *duhkha*, perhaps even primarily, is the frustration that follows from the attempt to find permanent satisfaction in objection of the senses and mind that are by their very nature temporary" (Bryant 2009, 204). From this standpoint, *avidya* is concomitant with the diagnosis of existence's ills—we are fundamentally frustrated because we lack the proper knowledge of how to liberate our being. More precisely, frustration stems from "ignorance, which is lack of discrimination, that is, being attached to mistaken notions of I and mine—considering the I to be the temporary body, senses, and fluctuating mind rather than pure awareness, and the mine to be one's spouse, children, and possessions" (Bryant 2009, 210).

Instead of a (Western) problem of evil, various Eastern philosophies present a worldview where people "suffer," and it is a primary task of these philosophies to offer a way out (or at least some sort of manageable relief for practitioners who dedicate themselves to these ways of life). Evil is not primarily a puzzle to be theoretically solved—this would miss the larger diagnostic portrait of the ailments of existence. The issue also doesn't hinge on a contrast between a creator-created order on the one hand, and a natural-aesthetic order on the other

hand (see, for example, Hall and Ames 1987). Rather, the distinction that marks the crucial difference between the problem of evil and the problem of suffering/frustration is the former's detachability from the lived problem of evil and the latter's core grounding in the lived dimensions of suffering. Soteriology is the West is, or at least has become, largely optional; Eastern traditions cannot do away with core soteriological commitments without serious violence to what they signify.

It should be noted that the problem of evil has two versions, one of which is the TPE that seeks to answer *why* God would allow for such evils. Adams doesn't address this question, but rather *how* God could defeat horrendous evils in the context of a person's life.[1] Adams acknowledges the lived dimensions of evil, however neither version is primordially rooted in this concern. Adams' approach stands at the border between theodicy and mysticism, but still seeks a meaningful response to an outstanding puzzle to be solved. The problem of suffering/frustration goes one crucial step further in articulating techniques and practices that aim to defeat horrendous evils. Moreover, along this path lies suffering deeper than the instances Adams cites as horrendous evils[2]—forms of spiritual agony such as the dark night of the soul (delineated by mystics like St. John of the Cross, and which enveloped Mother Teresa), or Kierkegaard's final stages (e.g., demonic despair) on the way to existential authenticity.

So what exactly is the problem of suffering/frustration/ignorance? Perhaps the most comprehensive view of the problem issues from the perspective of

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[1] Adams defines *horrendous evil* as follows: "an evil *e* is horrendous if and only if participation in *e* by person *p* gives everyone prima-facie reason to doubt whether *p*'s life can, given *p*'s participation in *e*, be a great good to *p* on the whole" (Adams 1990, 211 fn.5). She uses Chisholm's notions of "*balancing off* (which occurs when the opposing values of *mutually exclusive* parts of a whole partially or totally cancel each other out) and *defeat* (which cannot occur by the mere addition to the whole of a new part of opposing value, but involves some 'organic unity' among the values of parts and wholes, as when the positive aesthetic value of a whole painting defeats the ugliness of a small colour patch)" (Adams 1990, 211) to argue that, contrary to the initial appearance that horrendous evils would balance off and perhaps "engulf the positive value of a participant's life" (Adams 1990, 211), there are mystical notions indicating how God can defeat such evils.

[2] Her paradigmatic list includes: "the rape of a woman and axing off her arms, psychophysical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one's deepest loyalties, cannibalizing one's own offspring, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation, participation in the Nazi death camps, the explosion of nuclear bombs over populated areas, having to choose which of one's children shall live and which be executed by terrorists, being the accidental and/or unwitting agent of the disfigurement or death of those one loves best" (Adams 1990, 211-12). These are horrendous, no doubt, but there are clues to be gleaned even here—an ascetic practice of a yogi on the path to slow death by starvation or a samadhic monk burning in a fire would seem to be instances of horrendous evil, but they can also signify something more (e.g., achievement of the highest form of liberation).

spiritual masters who have pierced through the veil of experience, whose discernment reveals life's tapestry as one saturated in layers of suffering. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* diagnoses four root causes of this unhappy state of affairs. The first concerns ordinary kinds of pain "produced by one's own body and mind (such as illness, injury, insecurity, or anxiety)"; or pain produced by others "(such as mosquitos, enemies, obnoxious neighbors, even one's own sometimes troublesome family members and loved ones)"; or pain "produced by nature and the environment (such as storms or earthquakes)" (Bryant 2009, 207). This first level of pain (*tapa*) is widespread and easily recognizable as a basic kind of suffering.

A second more sophisticated level concerns both external and internal turbulence that leads to entrenched (and subtle) forms of frustration. At this second level are consequences of actions that reveal themselves to be ever-changing (*parinama*). "From this perspective, the experience of any happiness, even our 'Kodak moments,' which appear so satisfying at the moment of experience, are changing or temporary by nature" (Bryant 2009, 206).

The third type of frustration closely related to this consequential/ever-changing dimension focuses on one's dispositions. The mind tends to be a noisy creature, full of various agitations and never wholly satisfied (*samskaras*). As a result, the mind temporarily experiences "happiness, distress, or illusion … [but] this very turmoil is ultimately a condition of suffering, since the mind craves continuous happiness" (Bryant 2009, 209), and is caught in a self-reinforcing circle of frustration (for which we confabulate labels like *productivity*, *ambition*, and the like).

At the deepest level encompassing the above forms of frustration is the fourth cause, namely the primordial tendencies (*gunas* woven into the fabric of the cosmos) that give rise to forms of frustration (*citta-vrttis*). To use a helpful analogy, the process of natural selection delineates the conditions for competition and the associated bio-physical parameters of suffering. So likewise, the primordial tendencies enact the cosmic conditions for physical, mental, and spiritual suffering.

These four root-causes of frustration are part of Yoga's diagnostic toolkit to treat life's ills. Just as there a deepest root-cause, there is also a deepest level of suffering often experienced by those who climb the spiritual ladder to liberation. As alluded to previously, this level lies beyond horrendous evils. While much

attention has been paid to Yoga's therapeutic, in the next section I focus on understanding the nature of deepest suffering at the profoundest levels of being.

PROBLEM OF AFFLICTION

Affliction captures this deepest existential suffering intertwined with the profoundest spiritual pursuits. Similar to Adams, Allen addresses the how-question using ideas from Simone Weil:

> When dealing with affliction, we are moving out of the range of suffering caused simply by the operations of the natural world…[We] are forced to go beyond natural evil for four reasons: (1) Physical suffering is essential to affliction. (2) Affliction can be brought on by prolonged or frequent physical suffering. (3) Affliction breaks the framework we have so far used to deal with suffering caused by the natural world. (4) … Weil's account of how we may find the love of God in affliction enables us to relate physical suffering brought on by nature to the love of God in a new way. So far, we have only claimed that we can experience God's love *through* suffering; now we will see how we may experience the love of God *in* suffering itself. (Allen 1990, 199)[3]

Affliction is more than just physical suffering since "we *are* crushed or degraded. Affliction fills us with self-contempt, disgust, and a sense of guilt or defilement … [we are] not only battered, outraged, and uprooted, but [regard *ourselves*] with loathing and a sense of defilement" (Allen 1990, 200). Yet it is through-and-in this very condition that liberation presents itself, nursed by the darkest of nights.

The how-question (how God can defeat evil) is answered mystically by affirming that love is present in affliction, but only revealed through tribulations which empty-out-self. In other words, this contact with God (immanent-transcendent reality at the level of beatitude) is a contact with the

[3] In relation to the categories laid out in Takaki 2016b, philosophies of living well (of which Aristotelian and Confucian ethics offer paradigmatic examples) do not fare well in the face of either suffering or affliction. The "framework" Allen references is Stoic (Epictetus, specifically) and corresponds to what I termed *philosophies of living*, whose core characteristic of resilience deals with natural suffering (but not affliction). Lastly, what I termed *philosophies of being* has the core characteristic of antifragility, which parallels (4).

deepest love via the deepest pain—for "what a difference when the *same* pain [insofar as such pain can be isolated in its physical-psychological dimensions and judged as the same] results from the grip of a friend, and not the mindless grip of nature" (Allen 1990, 203). Love revealed in profound chastening is an existential realization afforded to those who have walked the razor's edge of liberation, exemplified in Christ's affliction.

While Allen's perspective is informed by spiritual giants who have faced horrendous evils and darknesses beyond, what about spiritual aspirants that hit a plateau in their journeys, or the majority mired in daily strife? Unlike Allen, Adams views the problem of affliction from an eschatological perspective, bringing suffering down to earth for the common "hackers" struggling to make a go of things. The question is whether such suffering can also be affliction; for Allen's appeal to spiritual masters respects the arduous path (with its depths of suffering) to liberation. The habits of self that are cultivated, probed, and ultimately released seem to be of a qualitatively different order from even horrendous suffering inflicted on those unfortunate enough to be imprisoned in such dungeons of pain. Indeed, Weil writes that there "is both continuity and a separating threshold, like the boiling point of water, between affliction itself and all the sorrows which, even though they may be very violent, very deep, and very lasting, are not afflictions in the true sense" (Weil 1998, 43).

The issue raised here is the nature of the problem of affliction, which has analogues in other soteriological traditions. For example, in Zen Buddhism, our original nature is one of enlightenment, whose child-like naturalness practitioners strive to regain. Since we are originally "saved," there are egalitarian forms of salvation, as found in Pure Land Buddhism. But more stringent forms of Buddhism hold that while true, this lacks the crucial dimension of cultivation earned through austere practice in emptying-out-self (requiring years of meditative practice, long suffering, etc.). In brief, one kind of liberation seems to be gained on the cheap, as it were, while the other appears more authentic, as it is forged by trials, commitment, and practice. Likewise, is "eschatological affliction" gained on the cheap, while the path traveled by spiritual masters the genuine article? This question is bound up with just what one takes affliction to be, where some degree of metaphysical commitment cannot be disentangled from the nature of the problem and how it is lived.

FURTHER EXAMINING THE PROBLEM OF AFFLICTION

In brief, (mystical) eschatology cannot be divorced from a picture of salvation as an expression of the highest love (*agape*), where affliction is part and parcel of such love. Accordingly, Adams views horrendous evils as encompassing affliction, from which an *egalitarian* eschatological point of view is presented; this stands in contrast to Allen's appropriation of *consummate* spiritual masters, a contrast further brought forth by Weil' distinction between affliction and other forms of suffering:

> The great enigma of human life is not suffering but affliction. It is not surprising that the innocent are killed, tortured, driven from their country, made destitute or reduced to slavery, put in concentration camps or prison cells [what would be classified as horrendous evils], since there are criminals to perform such actions. It is not surprising either that disease is the cause of long sufferings, which paralyze life and make it into an image of death, since nature is at the mercy of the blind play of mechanical necessities [what would be classified as natural evils]. But it is surprising that God should have given affliction the power to seize the very souls of the innocent and to possess them as sovereign master. At the very best, he who is branded by affliction will only keep half his soul. (Weil 1998, 43)

Weil is suggesting that affliction, while sharing some features of horrendous evil, is the deepest spiritual suffering for which the word *horrendous* does not suffice.

Adams also utilizes a mystical spiritual master (Julian of Norwich), but her picture enacts a differing view of the problem of affliction, and a differing metaphysical worldview as to how liberation ultimately works. While distinctions between levels of spiritual pursuit can be drawn, they ultimately don't matter since God defeats horrendous evils. By contrast, Weil (and Allen) emphasize the importance of the differing levels of spiritual achievement, and why the struggle along that path matters (especially, for Weil, in combatting the ever-present forms of self-deception that reside in the human heart). For even if Adams's eschatological picture is broadly right, the issue of one's personal practices isn't directly addressed. To employ a term of art, Weil's problem of affliction provides resources to combat the *spiritual free-rider problem*, whose

metaphysical views are developed accordingly. Adams' eschatological approach doesn't fare as well with this problem, and might even be tacitly complicit in furthering some self-deceptive practices.

Let's go into a bit more detail on these two differing metaphysical pictures (and how they thereby create differing problems of affliction). To start with Weil, she writes:

> The evil which we see everywhere in the world in the form of affliction and crime is a sign of the distance between us and God. But this distance is love and therefore should be loved. This does not mean loving evil, but loving God through the evil…because everything that actually occurs is real and behind all reality stands God. [However, the major hurdle in seeing this is]…when his reality is not sensibly perceptible to any part of our soul, [and that is when] we have to become really detached from the self in order to love him. That is what it is to love God. (Weil 1998, 80-1)

Kenosis (or what Weil calls *de-creation*) is the path to mystical transfiguration by which we pierce the veil of good and evil, closing our distance to God. The machinations that define much of our personal identity are also a major stumbling block to seeing God as love. Rather than eschatology, Weil offers a path of spiritual cultivation that combats these machinations. There is "one effort to be made, and by far the hardest of all, but it is not in the sphere of action. It is keeping one's gaze directed towards God, bringing it back when it has wandered, and fixing it sometimes with all the intensity of which one is capable" (Weil 1998, 81). This most difficult of tasks reveals a vital parallel to the problem of suffering/ignorance, since both soteriological approaches emphasize the importance of practicing mindfulness. Both, not coincidentally, also recognize levels of spiritual achievement.

For Weil, robust forms of love that erase the distance between a practitioner and God—forms that are fully de-created or emptied out—are distinguished from implicit forms of love (other stages along the path of spiritual development that still contain some degree of distance). "The implicit loves of God—love of neighbor, love of the beauty of the world, love of religious ceremonies and friendship—have the secret presence of God in them. What makes each a love of God is that in each case human action is constituted not by self-seeking or

preservation, but is a matter of opening itself up to the reality of strangers, friends, the natural world, and God's mediated presence in the sacraments" (Springsted in Weil 1998, 27). In other words, one is practicing emptying-out, but is still on the path towards closing the gap between God and one's true being (one's *new self* or *pneuma*).

The picture that Adams draws is similar in conclusion to Weil's metaphysical view, but significant differences emerge from a consequential viewpoint. There are three general approaches Adams sketches as to how horrendous evils can integrate one's being into a personal relationship with God. In general, all three approaches sketch how "horrendous suffering can be meaningful by being made a vehicle of divine redemption for victim, perpetrator, and onlooker, and thus an occasion of the victim's collaboration with God" (Adams 1990, 218n.20). An important example she uses is Julian of Norwich's notion of "heavenly welcome" or "divine gratitude" imparted to those who have suffered significantly, where God thanks those who have endured such suffering, and where the nature of this welcome/gratitude is an overflowing bliss that defeats suffering (e.g., Julian of Norwich 1978, 203-4, 210-11, and 329-32). What is worth noting is that Julian of Norwich also recognizes the dangers of spiritual free-riderism (see, for example, Julian of Norwich 1978, 193-6), signifying a middle ground between the spiritual elite and more ordinary spiritual aspirants—in other words, she is not "guilty of emphasizing a personal interior life [on which spiritual masters place emphasis] to the detriment of the social and eschatological elements of Christian spirituality" (Colledge and Walsh 1978, 74). Her middle ground discounts shallow eschatological understandings of the sort that spiritual free-riderism enables.

In sum, Weil's picture of affliction responds to the deepest forms of human suffering with an "antifragile" (Takaki 2016b) metaphysics, where it is only through-and-in the darkest nights of the soul that one can thereby emerge into soteriological light. By contrast, Julian of Norwich's picture of alleviating affliction (and other forms of suffering) by divine gratitude—a path that mixes interior practices with the social and eschatological elements of Christianity—is not quite antifragile (nor is it, to use terminology from Takaki 2016b, *resilient*); rather it is an egalitarian path open to all who "do their best" even if falling short of spiritual mastery (see Colledge and Walsh 1978, 95-6). Thus while prone to spiritual free-riderism, it is tempered by genuine effort and endured suffering, for whatever level of spiritual "handicap" one may struggle with.

WHY THESE TWO PICTURES MATTER

Life's perennial problems range from the profound (*avidya* perhaps being the best example from world philosophy/religion) to the pedestrian (such as physical forms of evil). Explorers of this family of related problems tend to neglect the pedestrian (but perhaps no less significant) problems of evil, suffering, ignorance, and affliction, such as losing a loved one to violence (evil), enduring cancer and its razing propensities (suffering), making foolish choices that enable addictive behaviors (ignorance), and finding one's self in a state of suicidal depression (affliction).

What Julian of Norwich (and Adams) creates is a path for humanity to regain or perhaps discover what is latent in all of us. I speculate that this path isn't restricted to the mystical Christian tradition (nor to creation-based metaphysics), as there are congruent soteriological developments in various worldviews (discernable in Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Sufism, and so forth). The high-road of the spiritual elite—yogis, saints, sages, roshis, etc.—signified by Weil's problem of affliction serves as a regulative ideal for the most dedicated of spiritual aspirants; by contrast, Julian of Norwich (and Adams) presents a problem for the masses that grapples with pedestrian (and even horrendous) forms of evil, suffering, ignorance, and affliction.

Besides the obvious differences between these two paths (and their associated difficulties), how are they related? Adopting a comparative stance, Edwin Bryant's incisive translation and commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* sheds light on pedestrian forms of suffering and why a path for "the masses" matters:

> In my view, it is unfeasible that [the path of] devotion can be construed as an alternative to the practice and dispassion [of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain soteriological traditions] … not even the much misrepresented *tantric* traditions …. [One] can apply faith, vigor, memory, *samadhi* absorption, and discernment under one's own steam [as is largely the case with Zen Buddhism, for example], or apply these in devotion to God [*Isvara*], which can expedite the process. (Bryant 2009, 87)

In alternate terms, Julian of Norwich's path of faith can expedite liberation from

evil/suffering/affliction. However, such faith also requires continual practice (e.g., conscientiously practicing sacraments) and the cultivation of dispassion (kenotic emptying-out). These three elements of faith ("devotion"), practice, and dispassion can expedite union with God. The coupling of these three relata can enact a path to defeat life's perennial problems, even for the most inconspicuous and unpretentious of followers.

It should be noted that while *Isvara* is often viewed as a non-creator type of God (although see Bryant 2009, 89-91)—or perhaps more fittingly, a Godhead—what is salient from a comparative point of view is that various "rivulets" of spiritual practice can still lead to liberation for those gripped in the vice of life.[4] That these paths are followed in earnest seeking matters most, less so the institutional affairs differing between and within traditions. More broadly, Bryant suggests that the "universalistic tenor of the *sutras*" (Bryant 2009, 95) transcends theistic and sectarian boundaries.

So an opaque optimism abounds. What about a more despairing view of things? John Gray, in his works arguing for a plausible pessimism about the human condition, does not hold the institution of Christianity (distinct from the mystical element of Christ as exemplar) in high regard. However, he argues that it does get one thing right—the fallenness of mankind (in brief, the history of humanity as testimony to the problem of evil writ large). This state of perpetual fallenness is the bedrock for mounting metaphysical prospects to redeem humanity, of which Adams' eschatological appeal is an instance. Furthermore, whether one sympathizes with the path-for-the-masses or finds it and similar solutions fundamentally lacking (as Gray probably would), in either case a key point is missed—a point likewise missed by blanket charges of spiritual free-ridership. The message is brought forth by Tolstoy in "My Religion," namely the injunction: resist not evil, which "means never resist, never oppose violence; or, in other words, never to do anything contrary to the law of love" (in Kaufmann 1964, 53). Eschatological metaphysics *only* gains traction amidst the background of kenotic love, and the problem of spiritual free-riders is *only* a problem insofar as we find plausible the condemnation of those who take

[4] The problem of suffering/ignorance encompasses the problem of evil given the fundamental diagnoses that the former offers for life's ills—to reemphasize, it is from the perspective of the *lived* problem of evil that the former encompasses the latter. However, the TPE, with its more circumscribed problem-base, only intersects with the problem of suffering/ignorance. Whether the same holds for Adams' version of the problem of evil would depend on the congruency of *Isvara* (or Godhead) with Adam's mystical proposal to solve her how-question.

advantage of the space afforded by forgiveness and its ilk. In brief, while eschatology and spiritual elites offer a way out of life's perennial problems, the "transcendental condition," as it were, underlying both is the simple yet profound message hidden in plain view, that of the "law of love." Free riders take-advantage-of, and may even propagate evil. Resist not. Eschatologies lay out a vision of who is saved and who isn't, but this is beside the point, harboring as it often does implicit bookkeeping and traces of condemnation.[5] Resist not.

CATASTROPHE ETHICS

But is resisting-not a recipe for chaos, given the human condition? An analogue of resisting-not, morally inverted, is the contemporary injunction to let markets be free (even if they really aren't—see, for example, Chang 2010). There are long-standing tangled relations between economics, politics, and religion, but perhaps never as influential as in today's global capitalist ethos. Indeed, much of contemporary philosophy is made possible by a background of affluence which Tim Mulgan critiques. Mulgan (2011) adopts a hypothetical perspective of a future broken world[6] to which a contemporary philosopher (an "affluent") travels. This future world is

> absolutely broken. We do not enjoy favourable conditions. We cannot meet all basic needs while respecting basic liberties …. [This world is] broken relative to its own past. We know that, whatever we do, we cannot enjoy the quality of life taken for granted by our affluent ancestors …. [This world is additionally] broken relative to its own future. We also know that, whatever we do, our descendants cannot hope to enjoy even the quality of life that we ourselves take for granted. This is partly due to natural causes: the climate is becoming more unpredictable, sea levels continue to rise and the world becomes ever

[5] Or as Albert Schweitzer puts it, what "the Kingdom of God is in reality is shown by the part which it plays in the life of faith. The precise conception which is held of its coming is a matter of secondary importance" (in Kaufmann 1964, 421). Eschatology, while important (though differentially for, say, Protestants versus Catholics), is of secondary importance to "living faith" (ibid.), since we "are no longer content, like the generations before us, to believe in the Kingdom that comes of itself at the end of time" (in Kaufmann 1964, 424).

[6] While Mulgan ties his thought experiment to the devastation wrought by climate change, there are other possibilities that might eventuate in a broken world, such as the rise of artificial intelligence, a global pandemic, and so forth (see Bostrom and Cirkovic 2008).

> hotter. But it is also due to our collective social failings. Although we show far greater concern for our descendants than affluent people did, we still tend to keep a disproportionate share of resources for ourselves, sacrificing our descendants to save our contemporaries.
>
> Our affluent visitor would thus identify two key assumptions of affluent philosophy that do not hold in our broken world: the assumption of favourable conditions; and the optimistic assumption that, owing to economic, social and technological progress, future people are bound to be better off than present people … these two assumptions played a key role in affluent philosophy. That philosophy must therefore be radically rethought for a broken world. (Mulgan 2011, 11-12)[7]

As this thought experiment relates to the categories of living well, living, and being, can they find a place in a broken world? It seems clear that authentic philosophies of living well (not its affluent *mis*appropriations) would be too fragile for a broken world. Philosophies of living could contribute to practicing resilience but would need to jettison (or seriously revise) background assumptions about the goodness of the cosmos, given such brokenness. Lastly, anti-fragile philosophies of being can find a home in any habitat, even in the face of conditions more extreme than catastrophic risk—what are sometimes called regimes of "existential risk," where human extinction is imminent (see Bostrom and Cirkovic 2008). The new question that arises is whether resisting-not and a path-for-the-masses can find a place in regimes of catastrophe. For, as noted previously, Julian of Norwich's picture doesn't fit into any of the three categories, so it cannot appeal to the resources that philosophies of living or philosophies of being have in the face of the most serious of life's difficulties—an emergent order of suffering present in Mulgan's absolutely broken world.

In brief, the question is whether resisting-not would suffice as the core of a catastrophe ethics for a future world of systemic brokenness. It is here that the

[7] Affluent philosophy has the further following characteristics: belonging to an Anglophone tradition; "atomistic method" (Mulgan 2011, 7); and temporal and cultural myopia (Mulgan 2011, 8). Perhaps most importantly, affluent philosophy is a specialized activity (modeled on a scientistic point of view) with a concomitant separation of the individual from the common good—while pre-affluent "philosophers saw a tight connection between the good life for an individual and the good of society … [a]ffluent philosophy separated individual good from common good, and treated the former as prior to the latter" (Mulgan 2011, 6). Compare also Takaki 2016a and 2016b.

spiritual free-rider problem is most serious, since the habits of self arduously practiced-and-entrained in philosophies of living and philosophies of being are not fully present in the path-for-the-masses. The general problem of fallenness also acquires an urgency not to be found at any other time in human history (even a hypothetical state of "nature," which is already significantly funded). In this broken world of systemic scarcity the basic conditions for survival impose severe boundary conditions that affect all other considerations. And since resisting-not is fundamentally an open border policy, it would appear to be engulfed by the innumerable temptations and burdens of a broken world (game-theoretic approaches to the free rider problem provide similar assessments).

However, we can invert this perspective and adopt a soteriological point of view, where these broken conditions may actually sow the seeds of authentic hope. For when the excesses of materialism are stripped away, it is precisely in conditions of deficit that only love remains for certain ways of life. The key idea is that notions like fairness, justice, individual freedom, pursuit of happiness, rights, etc. are no longer fundamental values. A catastrophe ethics for a broken world pares such affluent notions. Of course, on the one hand, aspects of these ideas could be salvaged for living in a broken world, and on the other, resisting-not runs the risk of extinction by brute behavior. Evolutionarily speaking, the potential consequences of options along this continuum remain grim. But resisting-not is neither a game theoretic strategy nor an evolutionary phenomenon as such, even if it can be approached from these levels of analysis. What resisting-not reveals soteriologically is a transfigurative perspective—a transitional cusp of cusps, as it were—that inverts these levels of analysis, as associated terms like *losing* and *extinction* become transformed into the very soil of true love (forgiveness, condemning-not, embracing affliction, and so forth).

Whether or not a fundamentally broken world comes to be, we are faced with the same challenge of life's perennial problems, but made more urgent given the current global state of affairs. Even if the path-for-the-masses is an option different from philosophies of being, the regulative image of past spiritual masters still guides and informs eschatological approaches and the like to soteriology. The common denominator is the practice of resisting-not, and the embrace of its innumerable pitfalls. For there seems to be no other viable way—not beastly behavior (whose consequences nudge us towards extinction), nor warmed-over ethical notions (affluent or otherwise) divorced from the

primordial-and-transfigurative importance of this practice. The added twist is that the view from a broken world reveals such viability, and can thereby assist in alleviating critical points that lead to catastrophe.

There are clearly a host of possible futures that may unfold, from the imaginable to the unimaginable. George Orwell's *1984* depicts a future that reinforces the need for a transformative point of view, and offers a "social imaginary" (albeit in a markedly different sense of Charles Taylor's 2004 development of this rich idea) which indirectly deters the need for a catastrophe ethics. Orwell's insights serve as a cautionary flag for life's perennial problems taken to an extreme, whose prescient possibilities are worth considering:

> Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing. Do you begin to see, then, what kind of world we are creating? It is the exact opposite of the stupid hedonistic Utopias that the old reformers imagined. A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but *more* merciless as it refines itself. Progress in our world will be progress toward more pain. The old civilizations claimed that they were founded on love or justice. Ours is founded upon hatred. In our world there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. Everything else we shall destroy—everything. Already we are breaking down the habits of thought which have survived from before the Revolution. We have cut the links between child and parent, and between man and man, and between man and woman. No one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer…. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. There will be no laughter, except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. There will be no art, no literature, no science …. But always—do not forget this, Winston—always there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler. Always, at every moment, there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless. If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—forever. (Orwell 1949, 270-1)

This is an image not simply opposed to faith, hope, and love, as what it depicts are not merely disbelief, despair, and hate. In the place of disbelief is *active* false

belief passing for truth; rather than despair is injustice *posing* as hope; and substituted for hate is *love* of Big Brother (or more apropos, multinational corporations rather than statism). It is moral inversion of the highest order, where there no longer are problems of evil, ignorance, suffering, or affliction, since the underlying soteriological elements that make possible these problems *as* problems are replaced by pure hypocrisy. In other words, ideals like pursuing truth and justice are only made possible by a more fundamental value, that of love. For without this value of values, any ideal can be subverted and inverted in Orwellian fashion, where at root lies ego, pride, and the pursuit of power. In this light, as fragile and naïve as resisting-not appears, entwined with such weakness simultaneously lies its strength and meaningfulness. In addressing life's perennial problems, is there anything more paramount than this?

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