Evolutionary Evils and the Goodness of God

The Problem of Animal Suffering for Christian Theism

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Part Two

An *Aesthetic* Approach to the Problem of God and the Evolutionary Suffering of Animals
(terminology to be explained later)
(Funding for this book came from a one-year Fellowship at the Center for the Philosophy of Religion at Notre Dame University, 2011-12.)
Brief Review of Part One (for anyone who missed it)

• **Proposed**: Proclamations of “peace” between evolutionary (Darwinian) science and Christianity may be premature. (I singled out Alvin Plantinga’s recent claim that all the “theses” of evolutionary science are plausibly compatible with the essential teachings of Christianity (where all the orthodox versions of Christianity intersect, or given “mere Christianity” (C. S. Lewis.))

• **Proposed**: The thesis of Natural Selection (or Darwinism, or “survival of the fittest) as the alleged means of creating, forming, eliminating, and preserving species, including our own may be a source of “deep conflict” with Christianity (such that if the thesis of NS is true, Christian theism (belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly wise, wholly good—just and self-sacrificially loving—God) is false.

• **Proposed**: In the abstract, such a process as NS may be compatible with Christian theism, but in the context of the actual world, as unveiled by recent natural sciences, NS *seems* on its face to be *incompatible* with Christian theism, and to count as decisive *evidence* against CT.
• I refer to the natural world as so unveiled as the **Darwinian World**,(DW) which is the source of a new form of the old problem of God and “natural evil” (evil that is caused partly or wholly by the workings of **nature**, rather than primarily by the actions of morally free **persons**.

• I refer to it as the **Darwinian Problem** of God and natural evil, and its special focus is on the evolutionary suffering of **animals** (although it also extends to evils endured by many human beings.)
The Darwinian World and Discourse on Nature and Religion.

• The DP grows from discovery of the DW during the last 300 years, or so, via sciences of physics, geology, and biology (especially genetics and genomics).

• The DW refers to a dramatic new picture of nature as an unfolding narrative rather than being a finished cosmic work—a “still painting,” as it were, or a simple artifact. (A revolutionary change in the rhetorical genre of discourse in natural science, hard to overstate the change—a “paradigm shift.”)
The Darwinian Problem

• **The core:** realization that sources of “natural evil” are so deeply “inscribed” in the physical and evolutionary systems of nature that we cannot separate them as “corruptions” or “deprivations” of an essentially good original. It seems clear that if God exists, “natural evils” exist by divine design.

• Tennyson had the DW in view when he wrote the famous verses on “nature red in tooth and claw.”
“Nature Red in Tooth and Claw”

• Who trusted God was love indeed
  And love Creation's final law—
  Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
  With ravine, shriek'd against his creed—
  (Alfred Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam, 1849)
Changing Times

• *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1845, Robert Chambers (1802-1871)

• Became a bestseller in the 1840’s, and paved the public way for acceptance of Darwinism.

• Tennyson was moved by the bleakness of planetary history amid grieving over a friend’s death.

• Tennyson touches *emotively* on the *philosophical* and *theological* problem of natural evil that was looming larger then.
Violent Terrestrial Conditions

Formative and functional planetary conditions guarantee the existence of natural evils, including brutal, wasteful, and random suffering by both human beings and animals. (More on This in a moment.)

Horrific Species

In the DW, so unveiled, Natural Selection has “created” multitudes of horrific species—i.e. species whose genetic expression and morphology causes horrendous suffering by both human and non-human beings.

http://kellyinnyc.wordpress.com/2011/08/03/giant-ichneumon-wasp/
Synchronic and Diachronic Dimensions

• Discovery of the **DW** and its planetary **narrative** supports making a distinction between the **concurrent** natural systems, workings, and diversity of species and such things as they have been in an unfathomably long “pre-historic” past.

• The **DW** depicts the **synchronic** (concurrent) dimension (roughly the Holocene, 11, 700 y. a.) as but the **latest** in a series of global “periods” and “epochs” extending back hundreds of millions of years.

• This **diachronic** dimension of the DW makes the **DP** much more difficult for theism than it already is. Why?
The Diachronic Darwinian Dimension and Arguments from Evil

• The most formidable arguments from evil are “evidential” rather than purely “logical.”

• **Main thought:** certain evils in the actual world make it extremely unlikely that God exists.

• **Two types:**
  
  – **Arguments from horrific evils that are “morally unnecessary.”** Main thrust: A morally good Being prevents horrific evils unless permitting them is morally necessary (on the MNC). William Rowe famously describes the slow, agonizing death of a fawn burned horribly in a fire. It is extremely irrational to believe that God could not prevent such instances of intense suffering without violating the MNC (on omnipotence).
  
  – **Arguments from the distribution of evils.** Paul Draper: the Hypothesis of Indifference (HI) is greatly more probable on the evils reported by the distribution of languishing and flourishing of animal individuals and species than is the Hypothesis of Theism (T).
The **DW** and Evidential Arguments from Evil

• It’s fairly obvious how the animal suffering reported by the DW in its **diachronic** aspect amplifies the force of both types of argument against theism.

• Consider (1) the episodic occurrence of mass extinctions, and then (2) the evolution of ancient species, the genetic expression of which inflicts intense suffering on members of other species.
“The Great Dying”

The Permian Extinction: The Great Dying. 252 million years ago, probably initiated by Super Volcanoes in Asia. 96% of species died.

All life descends from the “elected” 4%. 

The Great Dying
The Demise of the Dinosaurs

Pre-historic Parasites and Deadly Diseases

http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/01/08/scientists-biting-insects-may-have-killed-off-dinosaurs/
Autopsy of a Dinosaur

In the light of their research, the authors speculated on what an autopsy of a common ornithopod (bird-footed bipedal dinosaurs) would have revealed. If an autopsy had been made... it would have revealed many parasites and pathogens inhabiting the tissues. Some, like amoebic dysentery, malaria, and ascarid roundworms, would have caused lesions in the gut, liver abscesses, and distorted blood cells. But the actual cause of our dinosaur’s death would have been listed as *leishmaniasis*, a protozoan disease. Just like other members of the herd, he was victim of an emerging pathogen that was decimating the Cretaceous world. They submitted that the evolutionary success of such “micro-predators” decimated the entire ecological existence of the dinosaurs. *(Poinar and Poinar, What Was Bugging the Dinosaurs?)*
Diachronic Darwinism and Arguments

• As for arguments from horrific morally unnecessary evils, it seems extremely implausible that an omnipotent and wholly just and benevolent divine Being was incapable of preventing such things without thereby causing greater evil(s) or preventing the existence of equally great or greater goods. What candidate could there be for such evils and/or goods? (Surely not creation of fuel for our SUV’s as Hugh Ross has proposed.)

• As for arguments from the distribution of goods and evils, a metaphysical order of random indifference surely has more epistemic probability on HI than on T. Further, the pervasive presence of vicious micro-species (not to mention the macro-predators) surely adds to the probability of HI (or some other alternative hypothesis to T.)

• Finally, the diachronic narrative seems surprisingly “broken” rather than “integrated” in an aesthetically and morally purposeful way (as expected on theism.) The broken narrative of species adds still greater force to both types of argument from evil.
Tree of Life? Or Tree of Death?

- On close scrutiny, the Tree of Life looks more like a Tree of Death, most of its branches now dead (99.5% of species gone), and a relative few limbs left—including our own.

- This “pruning” by Natural Selection made life miserable for those who appealed to the *aesthetic grandeur* of evolution, as they still could do more successfully on appeals to design in *astronomy*. 
The DP Defiant

• **Proposed**: the **DW** generates a **DP** of natural evil that seems to defy available “God-justifying” explanations.

• **On inspection**, the evils reported by the **DW** do defy those explanations, or **theodicies** (attempts to “justify God” for causing and/or permitting—I prefer the term “authorizing”—the existence of certain horrific evolutionary evils in the experience of innocent animals.)
Theodicies Failing

Theist after Studying theodicy
Default Theodicies

• Last time I proposed that the two main “default” theodicies for theism on natural evils fail pretty abjectly when facing the DP

• (1) Lapsarian Theodicy: appeal to a ruinous Fall (human or angelic) that transformed the natural realm so as to bring about the natural evils in view. The explanation faces telling objections based on problems of Implausible Beatific Psychology, Cosmic Fragility, Moral Impropriety, and Implausible Transformation (leading to a Manichaean doctrine of creation.)

• (2) Neo-Cartesian Theodicy: appeal to cognitive conditions that prevent animals from suffering from states of pain in a morally important manner. The explanation faces prima facie objections (pet owners), a growing mountain of counter-evidence from animal ethology and neuroscience), and objections based on unviability in ethical practice.
Prevailing Current Theodicies

• Most participants in debate over God and natural evils acknowledge the failures just described, and opt instead for one of two innovative theodicies: (3) Only Way Theodicy or (4) Skeptical Theism Theodicy.

• Despite ingenuity (I believe that) they both fail, too.
Prevailing Theodicies: Only Way Theodicy, and Skeptical Theism

• (3) **Only Way Theodicy:** there is one and only one way to create a world comparable in value to ours. The natural evils reported by the DW are inevitable byproducts of those processes operating in any possible “first rate” world.

• (4) **Skeptical Theism Theodicy:** considering the epistemic gap between human beings and God, it isn’t surprising on theism that we have no God-justifying explanation of the relevant evils. If true, then those evils cannot count as evidence securing the epistemic improbability of theism.
Prevailing Theodicies and Omnipotence

• Briefly stated: both prevailing theodicies seem to fail on our basic intuitions of omnipotence.

• Only one way for an omnipotent Being to create a sufficiently valuable world? (The Christian promise is that God will bring about drastically different physical constants, values, and laws, eliminating such natural evils.)

• If God is a loving parent, we would expect to have a God-justifying explanation for the worst evils. (IMO: if we don’t have one, that epistemic condition counts as powerful evidence against theism.)
A Fifth Alternative: Aesthetic Theodicy Reconsidered

• In Christian history, some thinkers have used aesthetic values to explain certain evils. Some still do, although most either ignore Aesthetic Theodicy as irrelevant to the problem of evil or they disparage it as immoral. (Will see why.)

• Main thought: With respect to “authorization” of evils, God is best understood on the analogy of Cosmic Artist rather than Ethical Executive, constrained by ordinary ethical norms, such as the MNC.

• Support for God as “Artist” and the world as “Cosmic Art” is fairly strong in key Judao-Christian biblical and theological traditions of creation, fall, and redemption (using “fall discretely.”)
Aesthetic Goods, Evils, and God

- **Aesthetic Goods and Creation:**
  -Narrated in Genesis 1-3 as triumph of Cosmos over Chaos (Light over Primordial Darkness, Dry Land and over Primordial Sea).
  -Use of formal aesthetic values: symmetry, fittingness, unity, plenitude, diversity, integrity (*shalōm* is an aesthetic-moral concept).
  -Use of sensuous aesthetic values: luminosity, security, flourishing, and delight (*Eden* means “delight”) as divine vision (not the original condition) for human and non-human beings.
  -[Will come back to consider more complex aesthetic values in a moment.]
The Aesthetics of Fall and Redemption

• **Genesis 2-3** (however related to events of history) narrates the “fallen” human condition in terms of partial cosmic disintegration on all levels of existence, indicating (at least) dire need for cosmic re-integration. (More in a moment on why this is *not* a theodicy.)

• Poetic OT traditions narrate God’s acts of redemption as triumph over the Chaos Monsters that (still) inhabit the Deep.
God and Leviathan

Destruction of Leviathan". 1865 engraving by Gustave Doré
A Poetic Tradition of Cosmic Triumph over Chaos

**John Schneider** (from unpublished book):

In Psalm 74: 12-17, the writer depicts God as “crushing the heads of Leviathan” (v. 14). In Psalm 89: 9-13, God is said to have “crushed Rahab like a carcass” (v. 10), and in Psalm 104, in contrast God *created* Leviathan as a plaything (v. 26). In Isaiah 27, the prophet envisions a “day” when God will *defeat* Leviathan once and for all (v. 1). In Canaanite literature Leviathan (also called Yam) has seven heads. This correlates to both the Psalm just cited and to the imagery of Christ at war with the Dragon with seven heads in Revelation (identified as the Devil in Rev. 12: 3; 13: 1; and 17: 3).
The Cosmic Aesthetics of the New Earth

• Note: The Christian vision of existence in the New Earth does not include these anti-cosmic things. They have been “defeated” by a greater cosmic whole.

• Revelation 21: 1: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.”

• Revelation 22: 5: “And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

• Keep this last thought on the aesthetics of the new Cosmos, lacking the anti-cosmic things of Chaos on hold.
Aesthetic Moral Agency and Evils

• **Conclusion:** there is strong support for the aesthetic analogy for divine moral agency in creating and redeeming the Cosmos from anti-cosmic powers of Chaos. (We have not discussed the metaphor of God as the Artisan, or Potter, shaping peoples as “clay” in Isaiah 29: 16 and 64: 8; and in Romans 9).

• **But** how does the aesthetic analogy help to serve a [theodicy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodicy) dealing with the DP of natural evils?
Aesthetic Agency and Theodicy

• **Main thought:** Artists have greater discretion in “authorizing” aesthetic “evils” than do ordinary ethical agents. In art, the MNC condition does not apply.

• All sorts of artists deliberately use formal ugliness in the interest of creating beauty of the whole. Many examples of this, especially in post-classical arts.

• If successful, the moments of discord, or darkness, or villainy, or grotesque movement, and the like make indispensable contributions to the total beauty of the work as a finished whole.

• On reflection, we would not remove those ugly patches even if we could, because doing so would subtract from the total greatness of the work.

• This thought leads to a proposal on theodicy by the great analytical philosopher Roderick Chisholm. It provides a means by which to correct defects of Aesthetic Theodicy as employed in the Christian past, and also by some thinkers now.
Aesthetic Theodicy Past

- Augustine occasionally suggested that God created certain disorderly things in nature (poisonous creatures and predation, especially) for aesthetic reasons. Such things provided “antitheses” that both amplified the good and served moral harmony and balance. (He and others suggested that eternal damnation in Hell served the beauty of Heaven in this fashion!)

- Some modern thinkers have stressed the importance of horrific evils in creating “clashing conflicts” which produce “deep beauty” (Whitehead) in the Cosmos (Wendy Farley explores the beauty of tragedy and even monstrous horror and challenges Christians to see this beauty as the justification of the evils.)

- John Hick typifies modern assessments of Aesthetic Theodicy: it “de-personalizes” evil, and depicts God as using the participants in evil as mere means to ends. Meanwhile: it offers no resolution of the injustices and horrors done to victims. Ivan Karimazov’s famous tirade voices Hick’s typical indignation against using aesthetic values in theodicy.

- Can this huge defect of Aesthetic Theodicy be repaired?
Roderick Chisholm: the Defeat of Evil

http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_NAPANEE_K118.htm
The Concept of “Defeat” for Evils

• Chisholm (not a public theist) judged available theodicies (theodicies of Free Will, Soul Making, Only Way, and so forth) to be failures.
• The one hope for theodicy: God would be morally justified in causing or permitting (I prefer the term “authorizing”) evil(s) just in case God “defeated” the evil(s).
• “Defeat” defined: a state of affairs comprising evil(s) (E) and important good(s) (G) where (E) and (G) are integrated as a whole (W), which is both better than (G) by itself and better than it could possibly be without the evil(s) E. Some of Chisholm’s examples were aesthetic—compositions that incorporated ugly forms into total beauty.
• Prediction: producing a plausible scenario for evil(s) in the actual world will prove very difficult to do; and theists will generally resist the proposal because it requires seeing God not as devoted to minimizing evils so far as He can, but rather to maximizing goods despite very great cost to creatures.
• Nevertheless: if “defeated” as defined, it would be a morally good thing for God to have “authorized” the evil(s) and even a bad thing for God not to have authorized it (them). On “defeated evil” (DE), we should be thankful to God for authorizing rather than preventing the evil(s).
Marilyn McCord Adams and the “Defeat” of “Horrendous” Evil

Marilyn McCord Adams applies Chisholm’s concept of “defeat” to “horrendous evils” suffered by human beings.
Adams and the “Defeat” of Horrors for Humans

• **So Adams:** the transformed existence and experience of God in Heaven will be such that the participants in such evils will be *grateful* to God for their participation. The live of such persons as *wholes* will be such that they themselves would not wish the horrors *removed*, despite the horrific quality.

• **However,** Adams does not think this “*meaning-making*” capacity is impossible for animals. Like Hick, she leaves animals out of the discussion of God and evil.
The Aesthetic “Defeat” of Evil and Biblical Traditions.

• Is there anything like support for something like Chisholm’s concept of “defeat” for evils as a God-justifying explanation of evils generally and/or evils endured by animals, as reported by the DW?

• I believe there is, and not just in isolated examples of *felix culpa* (“fortuitous sin”), as in Joseph’s brothers, the “hardening” of Pharaoh’s heart, David’s adultery, and Judas Iscariot betraying Jesus, among other cases of God as the primary authorizing agent of evils.

• Major biblical traditions support something like a *theodicy* of “defeat” for evils, and it goes along essentially *aesthetic* rather than ordinary *ethical* lines (God “authorizes” evil(s) for aesthetic reasons rather than logically-causal moral ones.)

• The traditions: contained in Genesis 1-3, the book of Job, and in Romans 8-11 (the famous digression of Paul on divine election, badly misread and misused by John Calvin and dogmatic Calvinism.)
Genesis and Aesthetic Theodicy

- As seen, the creation account(s) in Genesis 1-3 indisputably include *aesthetic* values in evaluating original cosmic moral goodness.

- But further, the aesthetic values are not those of plain and simple beauty achieved through straightforward cosmic *harmony*. God achieves cosmic beauty partly through sharp contrasts between elemental *anti-cosmic vestigial* *Chaos* and elemental *anti-chaotic created* *Cosmos*. God does not vanquish the primordial Darkness and Deep, but *integrates* them into Cosmos as *Night* and *Sea*. Their elemental anti-cosmic powers are not destroyed, but “defeated” by the “very good cosmic whole.

- Still further, these anti-cosmic powers are *inscribed* into nature from the very beginning (not consequent to a Fall). The author gave no God-justifying moral *explanation* for God’s decision to do so. The values seem purely *aesthetic* and discretionary.

- The tacit thought also is that the Cosmos began in an aesthetically unfinished ontological condition. The narrative of Adam and his wife in Eden makes this thought all but explicit, especially when we ponder the unexplained presence of the Serpent.
Eden and the Serpent

Blake depicted the Serpent as a Dragon-like creature. He suggested that it was an ANE Chaos Dragon, only miniaturized as a creature of God.
The Serpent: A “Wild” Creature of God

• “Now the serpent was more crafty than any wild animal that the Lord God had made.” (Genesis 3: 1).

• The Serpent is not the Devil, but a “crafty” “wild animal,” a creature of God.

• The Serpent enters and exits without explanation. Why did God create it and allow it to deceive Adam and Eve?

• Proposal: Blake was right. The Serpent is a chaos dragon in miniature, integrated into Eden for some reason reserved for God.

• God does not immediately destroy the anti-cosmic creature, but promises its eventual “defeat” in and through human history.
The Serpent and the Analytics of Evil

• Genesis 3: 14: “Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures ....”

• The Serpent is first in the line of responsibility for evils among the animals. (The tradition including Theophilos of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyon seems right: Adam and Eve were more like innocent children than supernaturally endowed adults, as Augustine thought; and so they could not bear sole blame for he entry of evils into the world.

• If we take the Serpent as a signifier of a “morally wild,” or “chaotic,” “random,” or “quantum” reality of created existence, then the account of evils is not a Lapsarian Theodicy, as commonly believed. It can’t be, since the Fall (Lapsus) grows inevitably from that “wild” created condition.

• It seems that the writer of Job thought the same thing and elaborated this enigmatic account of “morally wild” evils in the entire book.
Aesthetic Theodicy and the book of Job

• **My approach**: rests heavily on recent studies that place the book in its historical context, and understand it in its own religious and rhetorical terms. (See esp. Carol Newsom and Samuel Balentine, among others.)

• **All agree**: (1) at the end God does not “bully” Job back into submission, but gives Job the answer he desperately desired (if not in an expected form); (2) the answer included a dramatic reconstruction of classical (deuteronomistic) Hebrew tradition on God and the occurrence of evils (the morally causal logic: righteousness assures human flourishing, while wickedness insures languishing in the end; and (3) the fictional character of Job speaks for a larger historical community of Jews who, despite innocence of relevant wrongdoing, suffered horrors as slaves in Babylonian exile.
What Was Job’s Objection?

• **Job’s Protest**: throughout the lengthy dialogues between Job and his “friends” (Job 4-37), Job’s angry defiance grew: Job protested that God had no moral grounds for afflicting him as God had done.

  Job likens God actions to a mighty enemy who assaults a weaker foe just because his superior power enables him to do so (response to Eliphaz, Job 16: 1-17: 16). Job likens God to the wicked who oppress and crush the poor for no reason (Job 27: 1-23). (These are the most extreme forms of wickedness in the Hebrew register of evils.)

• No wonder the “friends” feared that Job’s own “wild words” (Job 6: 3) exposed his evil out of his own mouth—as the great storm approached one imagines them expecting lightning to strike Job any minute. [See Job’s accusations against God in Job 30: 20-31].
Moral Chaos

• A major theme of the book is the appearance of Chaos in the moral realm—worse than mere injustice, the moral patterns of the world exuded moral indifference on God’s part, and randomness as the existential rule.

• In his first soliloquy, Job alleges that he—Job—is a living “micro-chaos” and likens himself to the mythic Chaos that God supposedly tamed (Job 6: 12 and following). Why was he born, then? (Job 10:18-22). Given what he represents, Job utters the bitter anathema on God’s world: “Let there be darkness,” a reversal of everything back to creation day one (Job 10: 22).

• The theme of moral Chaos is at the core of everything from beginning to the end of the book.
The Prologue: The “Satan” and Moral Chaos

• **The prologue**: important mainly because it informs attentive readers in advance that the core of Job’s complaint—astonishingly—is *correct*. God concedes to the “Satan” (“Accuser”) that “you incited me against him, to destroy him *for no reason*” Job 2: 3). [The Hebrew term is *hinnām* not used elsewhere to describe divine treatment of creatures.] It confirms Job’s core complaint that his existence is a moral “turmoil” (Job 3: 25-6). [Newsom: the Hebrew term *rōgez* is closely connected with” anti-creative powers of Chaos. Here Job first mentions the looming terror of the Chaos Monster Leviathan (Job 3: 8).

• **Also important**: the prologue makes clear that “the Satan” is a creature of God entirely under divine control. It represents and unexpected metaphysical feature of the moral world. As such, it invites comparison with the Serpent in Genesis 2-3.
Job and Genesis 2-3

• Balentine: the prologue is designed to recall the story of Eden. The book of Job is “somewhat like a sequel to the book of Genesis” (S. Balentine, 41-3).

• Only in Job, the horrific evils follow from *obedience* rather than *disobedience*. [Nowhere in the dialogues do the “friends” appeal to a Fall to explain the occurrence of moral or natural evils; nor does “God” do so—on the contrary, as we will see.]

• In both stories, evil originates with a creature of God that personifies the unexplained existence of moral Chaos in the world.
Job, as depicted by French painter Leon Bonnat in 1900. Illustration: Hulton Archive/ Getty Images
Job and “Wild Things” in the Natural Realm

• Job supports his protest by means of various arguments from patterns in the actual world. One of those patterns involves Chaos in the natural realm.

• Following a string of stinging accusations against God, Job likens his condition to that of certain wild animals typically associated with realms of divine absence and desolation (Job 30: 1-31). (In ANE societies and in the Bible, the ostrich and the jackal are enigmatic creatures of incorrigible chaos.)

• Meditation on nature does not help Job, who has all but given up on the cosmic integrity of existence and, therewith, on the moral integrity of God.
Elihu’s “Nature Praise Hymn”

• As Job remains defiant to the bitter end, the “young man of God,” Elihu, cannot contain his rage at the elder man. Looking past Job’s agony, Elihu gives the last (and longest) speech of the dialogues.

• Newsom: Elihu’s speech is in essence a “Praise Hymn” based on the perfect harmony and cosmic order of nature under God. (He inattentively rehearses points that Job already made, albeit in a bitterly sarcastic tone.) Elihu advocates a simple aesthetic mode of celebration, awe, wonder, reverence, and humility before God immediately available in the natural realm for any with eyes to see and ears to hear. Elihu thereby either ignores Job’s points about the disorderly forms of nature, or he wasn’t listening and missed them altogether. Elihu positively assures Job that his afflictions make moral sense, and warns him to get in line.

• As Elihu takes his “bow” and makes his exit off stage, a great windstorm approaches, and the writer of Job dares to have God Himself speak at great length (without parallel in the OT.)
Elihu Speaks

http://gavinortlund.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/elihu1.jpg
God Speaks

• A conventional reading: God appears as Elihu had hoped and thunders at Job, bullying him back into properly reverent submission.

• Many scholars: (Eleanor Stump is good on this point) this would render the ending and the whole book “a noble irrelevance” (George Bernard Shaw). More likely, the writer conveyed an answer to Job (and readers) that made moral sense and met the core of Job’s objection that his sufferings (and those of many others) were “morally wild,” “morally quantum horrors,” “morally random” occurrences not predicted on classical Hebrew tradition. But what was the answer, if there was one?
Shift of Genre and Subject

• **Shift of genre:** we need to pay careful attention to the abrupt shift of rhetorical genre from *dialogue* to *poetry.* The *sense* of God’s answer to Job not contained by ordinary moral concepts as we would naturally expect (Job’s challenge is *moral* and his normative concepts are *cognitive* in a *legal* mode of discourse.)

• **Shift of subject:** Job’s subject was *justice* and the abysmal *moral* patterns of the world. The divine speeches focus *entirely* on things of *nature,* and it isn’t obvious how the contents are *relevant* to Job’s challenge (George Bernard Shaw: “noble irrelevance.”)
Shift of Aesthetic Form

- **Newsom**: rightly understood, the speeches are ingeniously relevant to Job’s legal challenge.
- The writer has *God* subvert Elihu’s simplistic aesthetics of cosmic *harmony* and *praise* by shifting into the aesthetics of the *sublime*.
- Deeply understood, nature presents itself as irreducibly *vast*, too *immense* for comprehension, and *complex* in modes that evoke not simple reverence for God, but tremendous *dread* and even *horror* at the strange things God has made.
The Sublime Aesthetic Theme

- Introduced by God’s appearance within the cyclonic storm (the same anti-cosmic force that destroyed Job’s property and children—his entire legacy.)

- Leads to a series of divine utterances about God’s intimate involvement with realms of creation that exist on boundaries between Chaos and Cosmos.

- Stunningly, “God” stresses approval and even admiration for these “boundary beings,” for the enduring existence of Chaos left uncaged within the “very good” Cosmos.

- I have to confine comments to three samples of this unexpected theology and its relevance to the DP of natural evil.
Sublime Cosmic Goodness

• In the first speech, God speaks admiringly of the Darkness and of the pillars of the primal Deep.

• Newsom: the most shocking thing is God’s approval of the Sea—normally an oppositional power. God assisted the birth of the Sea, and cared for it like an infant. (See Job 38: 8-11)

• God also speaks admiringly of wild animals normally associated with Chaos. Notably: God approves the ferocity of storms, and also that of predators, God also approves the vultures that feed on the corpses of dead human beings left on a field of war (Job 38: 22-41). There is no trace of thinking that such things exist as morally bad consequences of a Fall. Ballentine: this is Genesis corrected, or at least clarified.

• The terror and horror are nevertheless sublime and somehow good things and not aberrations or evils. The sense is not pure power over elemental things, but God’s approving and even nurturing role in integrating them into God’s purpose for the world.
God and Leviathan

• The entire second speech is God speaking about Leviathan. Notably: God claims complete control over the Chaos Monster, and even that God has made a covenant with him (Job 41: 1-6; God refers to Leviathan as God’s “servant forever,” 41: 4).

• The speech suggests that God has for some reason included Chaos in the Cosmos, and that in such a world morally wild (and unjust) things (such as Job’s afflictions) are bound to happen. This is a price God asks creatures to pay.

• Such a Cosmos is supposedly good, nonetheless. But exactly how so? For the victims of tragedy and horror, sublimity of such a world is no “defeat” of the tragic and horrific evils they endured.
The Aesthetics of Divine Majesty

- **Proposal:** what Job “sees” and “hears” from God in the windstorm is not simple divine *triumph* over Chaos as promised in classical Hebrew tradition on God and evil, and as voiced eloquently by the “friends.”

- Job rather “sees” and “hears” the promise of divine triumph in a deeper and more complex aesthetic form. Amid the strangely sublime realities, Job sees the *kingly character* of God. Readers are encouraged to participate in the aesthetics of divine *majesty* and *mastery* over anti-cosmic things.

- **Implied “Defeat” of evils:** the unifying theme of Job is very like the aesthetic concept of “defeat” for evil as set forth by R. Chisholm.

- The reading suggests that a process so randomly brutal and apparently wasteful as Natural Selection could very well fall within the aesthetic discretion of the Christian God. If so, “evidential” arguments from evil by Rowe and Draper are disarmed. Of course, as Chisholm predicted, many theists will find the aesthetic explanation of natural evils hard to accept. The world depicted is more terrifying than we would like.
God and the Future

• Many scholars comment on the awkward ending of Job—he regains his wealth but his children are still dead (he gets some new ones).
• If divine “majesty” suggests eventual “defeat” of Chaos and the emergence of perfected Cosmos, it falls short of specifying how this might happen, and in what form.
• Our reading of Job recalls the NT account of Jesus asleep and then arising regally to rebuke the winds and to calm the storm-tossed sea.
• Here is where Christian resources on the Atonement and Resurrection become crucial to theodicy. The “defeat” of tragic and horrific evils must come for them in an afterlife.
Aesthetic Theodicy and Animals

• How should we think about the afterlife and animals? That is another long lecture.

• Last thoughts: perhaps we may think of the evolutionary suffering of animals as “cruciform” (Holmes Royston III), and of their role in the history of species as “kenotic,” i.e. as a form of sacrifice for the sake of others.

• In that case, the “Tree of Death” is comparable to the Cross of Christ, the “Lamb of God.”

• Or in that case, it resembles the strange history of humanity under divine election, according to Paul. What appears to be a badly wasteful and failed plan, is resolved ingeniously by the Potter of the “clay” in the great good interest of everyone.
The Groaning of Creation and Election

- Perhaps we may apply Paul’s teaching on the aesthetics of divine election in the plan for *human* beings to our own vexed question about the meaning of existence for animals.
- Perhaps all species of animals will be in Heaven, and perhaps God knows how evils God asked them to endure for others’ sakes can really be “defeated.”
- I have written a chapter speculating on the “defeat” of evils for animals, but that is for another time. In Romans 8 Paul appeals to the aesthetic form of a *glory* that is about to come for the creation (Romans 8: 18-25).
- Meanwhile: the book of Job among other biblical traditions opens avenues to a non-lapsarian and aesthetic approach that seems more promising, at least, than available alternatives.