

Pathways in Theodicy: An Introduction to the Problem of Evil

Mark S.M. Scott

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Lucidly written, carefully researched, philosophically perceptive, and religiously challenging, *Pathways in Theodicy* demonstrates not only Mark Scott's mastery of reflection on fraught questions about God and evil but also great generosity as he provides eminently fair assessments of major Christian perspectives on the problem of evil.

These perspectives include: the much debated free will defense, which attempts to exonerate God by emphasizing humanity's abuse of the good gift of freedom; soul-making theodicy, championed especially by John Hick, which interprets evil and suffering as elements in a process that ultimately results in perfected persons; the insights of process theology, which save God's goodness at the expense of God's omnipotence; cruciform theodicy, as Scott calls it, which, taking its cue from Jürgen Moltmann, does not "explain" why evil exists but stresses that the redeeming God of love suffers with us in the process of defeating evil. In addition, Scott provides chapters on antitheodicy, outlooks that find theodicy "projects" indefensible and malign, and on how the success of theodicy depends on appeals to mystery and life beyond death. The latter theme is crucial because it means that absent life beyond death, theodicy fails. But even if theodicy banks on life beyond death, no presently earth-bound understanding can fathom how—somehow—all will turn out well. Mystery shrouds and arguably undermines that hope.

Two intersecting analyses govern Scott's assessment of theodicies. First, a theodicy will be complete just to the extent that it "explores five interrelated theological-philosophical questions: (1) the origin of evil; (2) the nature of evil; (3) the problem of evil; (4) the reason for evil; and (5) the end of evil" (65). Second, a theodicy will be complete and Christian only if it also displays five additional qualities: (1) fidelity to the sources of theology, especially scripture and tradition; (2) coherence: not only, is the theodicy internally consistent, but also, does it "make sense"; (3) relevance: does the theodicy engage current experience of evil; (4) is it creative in its approaches to evil; and (5) humility: does the theodicy acknowledge its own limits? (66).

Given these difficult requirements, it is not surprising that Scott's cost-benefit analysis finds liabilities as well as assets in every theodicy he evaluates. So while he eloquently acknowledges that encountering "even a slight fraction of the breadth and depth of evil in the world outstrips our intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities, and leaves us winded and wounded," it is prudent to reserve judgment before accepting his promissory note that theodicy is, finally, a "wondrous journey into the sacredness of a broken world awaiting redemption, tilting between despair and hope, moving toward the Light" (xiii).

At the end of every chapter, Scott provides helpful questions for discussion. The last set, for example, asks: "How would you construct a theodicy? How would you address the questions of theodicy?" (215). Scott himself offers another promissory note. Gesturing toward a "future project," the development of "my own constructive perspective,"

he suggests that it will highlight “five elements that are, in my view, essential for a compelling, coherent, and viable Christian theodicy” (213): (1) the relationship between free will and evil; (2) real-life experiences of suffering; (3) Christ’s significance for overcoming evil; (4) the importance of life after death; and (5) the mystery surrounding God’s providence and resolution of evil. Scott concludes a page later with an important challenge: “My study was always intended as the beginning of a conversation that would continue after you had turned over the final page of this book . . . Where the conversation turns next depends on you” (214).

Here, my acceptance of that challenge must be brief, but it makes a start by concentrating on issues that concern two of the five themes that Scott intends to address going forward: real-life experiences of suffering, and the importance of life after death. *Pathways in Theodicy* sometimes refers to paradigmatic evils, events such as the Holocaust or the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, which embody the problem of evil in especially shocking ways. Scott rightly notes that an overemphasis on such events as paradigmatic can lead to overlooking other important eruptions of evil. So let the record show that, at the time of my reading and writing about *Pathways in Theodicy*, the expanse of human suffering grew considerably, even if no “paradigmatic” evil was involved. On the night of 12 June 2016, for example, 49 persons were murdered, another 53 wounded, when Omar Mateen wantonly opened fire at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. About two weeks later, on 28 June, ISIS-related terrorists attacked Istanbul’s Ataturk Airport, killing 41 persons and injuring hundreds more. Then, on 14 July, in Nice, France, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhel drove a twenty-ton truck into the crowd celebrating Bastille Day on the Promenade des Anglais, slaughtering at least 84 people, including 10 children. Two days later, some 265 people lost their lives and hundreds more were wounded during an attempted military coup in Turkey.

This bloodshed was inflicted and suffered by human beings. Whether any of it will be widely considered paradigmatic evil remains to be seen, but the odds are against that assessment because the world has scarcely seen the last of such mayhem. The accumulation, if not escalation, of evil and suffering keeps rising, apparently without end. If God exists, God seems to have been unable or unwilling to prevent the carnage that took place in just a few summer days in 2016. Those disasters, moreover, are but a sliver of the vast evil and suffering that wreck human existence. If God suffers amidst the wrack and ruin, the comfort in that may be scant because nothing in this world can set right the unjust maiming and dying. Life will go on, justice will be sought, and suffering may diminish with time’s passage. But the brute facts of unjust death and suffering persist. That reality dooms theodicy—unless there is life after death.

The accumulated particularities of evil and suffering—so much of it defined by the *wasting* of human life—require life after death if there is to be any hope for theodicy. Unfortunately, theodicy must grapple with the prospect—appeals to mystery will not remove it—that even if God seeks to make all things new, right, and good beyond death, failure still stalks that hope. It does so because even if God embraces the murdered and maimed—and their loved ones—and seeks to make earthly evil and suffering pale into insignificance, a dilemma remains: can God do such things with moral integrity? If God ultimately defeats evil, what of the memory of the murdered and maimed—and their loved ones? What of the brute facts of unjust suffering and death? God might revise, if

not erase, memory and transcend, if not wipe out, facts, but if God does so, wouldn't something remain amiss? Don't candid murmuring about and honest protest against God's injustice still—and always—have their place?

Evil and suffering rage to such an extent that the universe is cracked beyond complete repair and redemption. Defense of the world's innocent victims bids acknowledgment that God's goodness—if God exists—is flawed. The future and credibility of theodicy depend on its becoming antitheodicy, which refuses to justify or accept God's relationship to evil. Otherwise, theodicy seems destined, no matter the denials, to legitimate evil and suffering in one way or another, an outcome that *Pathways in Theodicy* and any of its sequels are better off without.

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Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy

Evan Thompson

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In seeking to explore continuities between the conceptions of self-consciousness in neuroscience, philosophy, and religion, Thompson's *Waking, Dreaming, Being* sets forth an ambitious course that must simultaneously navigate the challenges of interdisciplinary discourse while accommodating non-specialists to those discourses. This is no minor feat, requiring a consistent methodology and a clearly formed thesis. Thompson describes his methodology as neurophenomenology, which "combines the careful study of experience from within with investigations of the brain and behavior from without. It uses descriptions of direct experience to guide the study of the brain processes relevant to consciousness" (28). Neuroscience empirically investigates observed experiences, and phenomenology names the philosophical approach describing internal experiences. Combined, they form the basis for exploring varying experiences of consciousness, including those provided by religious experience (in this case, Indian yogic traditions and Tibetan Buddhism). Each of these disciplines contributes to Thompson's primary argument, which he states explicitly: "The central idea of this book is that the self is a process, not a thing or an entity. The self isn't something outside experience, hidden either in the brain or in some immaterial realm. It is an experiential process that is subject to constant change. We enact a self in the process of awareness, and this self comes and goes depending on how we are aware . . . I call this the 'enactive' view of the self" (xxxii–xxxix). In this brief review the question before us will be: How does Thompson's enactive self as a no-thing hold the balance between the reductionist, empirical methodology of neuroscience and some of the non-reductionist claims of philosophy and religion (see pages 80–81)?