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Non-Identity Theodicy

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Since Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons*,¹ there has been a growing literature in the ethics of procreation and in intergenerational ethics reflecting on the following question: does it matter morally whether or not the people harmed or benefited by an action would have existed had that action not been performed?² For instance, could a mother have wronged her child by her choice of with whom to procreate, given that any choice other than the child's father would have produced not that child but a different child or no child at all? Parfit terms cases where the affected people are not identical with anyone who would have existed otherwise cases of *non-identity*.³

ABSTRACT: I develop a theodicy (Non-Identity Theodicy) that begins with the recognition that we owe our existence to great and varied evils. I develop two versions of this theodicy, with the result that some version is available to the theist regardless of her assumptions about the existence and nature of free will. My defense of Non-Identity Theodicy is aided by an analogy between divine creation and human procreation. I argue that if one affirms the morality of voluntary human procreation, one should affirm the morality of divine creation; conversely, denying the morality of divine creation commits one to denying the morality of human procreation.

1. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

2. Early discussions of this question were also published by Robert Merrihew Adams (see note 4), Thomas Schwartz ("Obligations to Posterity," in *Obligations to Future Generations*, ed. R. I. Sikora and Brian Barry (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978)), and Gregory Kavka ("The Paradox of Future Individuals," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11 (1982): 93–112). There have been many important publications focused on this question since the publication of *Reasons and Persons*. Among them are James Woodward, "The Non-Identity Problem," *Ethics* 96 (1986): 804–31; Matthew Hanser, "Harming Future People," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19 (1990): 47–70; Seana Valentine Shiffrin, "Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm," *Legal Theory* 5 (1999): 117–48; and Elizabeth Harman, "Can We Harm and Benefit in Creating?," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (2004): 89–113.

3. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 351ff. Related cases also feature in the literature on *moral luck*, in particular with respect to what Bernard Williams ("Moral Luck," in *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981)) and Thomas Nagel ("Moral Luck," in *Mortal Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979)) call *constitutive luck*—broadly, luck in who one is. Nicholas Rescher, for instance, writes that "a person can be fortunate to have a good disposition or a talent for mathematics, but she cannot be *lucky* in these regards, because chance is not involved. Her disposition and talents are part of what makes her the individual she is; it is not something that chance happens to bring along and superadd to a preexisting identity. . . . It is not as though there were some world-external, fertilization-preceding version of oneself who has the luck to draw a good assignment" (*Luck: The Brilliant Randomness of Everyday Life*

Theodicy is also concerned with evaluating actions that determine who will live—specifically, divine actions impacting the type of universe that has been created and sustained. If a different universe would have produced different people or no people at all, this complicates the question of whether God has wronged anyone by his choice of universe. However, with a couple of exceptions,⁴ extended reflection on non-identity considerations has been absent from contemporary work on the problem of evil.

In what follows, I develop a *theodicy*—proposed reasons why an all-loving and all-powerful God might allow evil and suffering⁵—that takes as its primary claim the position that our existence as the individuals that we are depends on the evil and suffering that preceded our coming to be. Robert Adams developed some elements of this theodicy, especially in articles in the 1970s, but he says that his work in this area does not constitute a theodicy.⁶ Here I aim to organize and add to Adams's ideas in order to construct a full theodicy.

Once I have presented the theodicy, I argue for the moral sufficiency of the divine reasons it proposes by making an analogy between divine creation and human procreation. Reflection on the morality of human procreation implies, I suggest, that it is not always wrong to create people into an environment in which you know they will suffer seriously. I argue, further, that if you think voluntary human procreation is in general morally permissible, you have even more reason to think that divine creation and sustenance is morally permissible; conversely, if you think it would be immoral for God

(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 30–1). Daniel Statman makes a similar claim: “Suppose somebody says, ‘Oh, how lucky I am to have such parents!’ The natural response to this seems to be, ‘Well, had you had different parents, you wouldn’t have been the same person.’ That is, luck necessarily presupposes the existence of some subject who is affected by it. Because luck in the very constitution of an agent cannot be luck for anyone, the idea of one being lucky in the kind of person one is sounds incoherent” (introduction to *Moral Luck*, ed. Daniel Statman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 12).

4. Robert Merrihew Adams considers the relevance of non-identity considerations to theodicy in “Must God Create the Best?,” *The Philosophical Review* 81 (1972): 317–32; “Existence, Self-Interest, and the Problem of Evil,” (originally published in *Noûs* in 1979 but reprinted with corrections) in Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and “Love and the Problem of Evil,” *Philosophia* 34 (2006): 243–51. Tim Mawson also considers the relevance of non-identity considerations to theodicy, in particular to the prospects for theodicy on the assumption that determinism is true (“The Problem of Evil and Moral Indifference,” *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 323–45).

5. “Theodicy” has been used to mean a number of things. As I use it, the theodicist does not need to claim to *know* that the reasons proposed by his theodicy are in fact among God’s reasons. He only needs to claim that *for all we know* they are among God’s reasons and that, if they are among God’s reasons, they plausibly depict God as loving and morally perfect despite allowing the evil and suffering he allows.

6. Likewise, when discussing Adams’s work in this area, William Hasker says that “the argument cannot bear the weight of ‘positive theodicy’—that is, of the task of explaining *why* evil exists or why it is appropriate that God should allow it to exist” (*Providence, Evil and the Openness of God* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 19).

to create and sustain our universe, then you have even more reason to think voluntary human procreation is in general immoral.

For a theodicy to be successful, it must meet two primary conditions: first, it should show that God has not wronged anyone by allowing evil and suffering, and, second, it should show that God's allowance of evil and suffering is motivated by virtue rather than by some flaw in character. Non-identity theodicy suggests that these two conditions can be met if three other conditions are fulfilled:

- (1) Those who come to exist could not have come to exist without God's policy of evil-and-suffering allowance.
- (2) God offers⁷ all who come to exist a great life overall.
- (3) God is motivated in creating and sustaining the universe by a desire to love those who come to exist.

I will discuss (2) most briefly. While some may not accept the offer, I assume that God offers to every person an eternal life that would be a great good to them overall. There are interesting questions about how God can make it the case that a person in the afterlife will be the same person as me. Perhaps it is just that a person who exists in the afterlife needs to remember being me and share core aspects of my personality and interests. Perhaps, in addition to this, God needs to bring together enough of the physical matter that constituted me at some point in my life in a similar enough arrangement. Perhaps I am an immaterial soul and God only needs to ensure that this immaterial soul exists in the afterlife, or that it is connected to some physical body in the afterlife. For the purposes of this paper, I assume (along with the vast majority of theodicies) that divine omnipotence is capable of meeting the challenge of allowing people who have died on earth to exist eternally, either continuously or through being brought back to life. I also assume that the goods present in the afterlife can be great enough and exist for long enough to outweigh even the greatest evils of the present age.

Condition (1) is the distinctive claim of Non-Identity Theodicy.⁸ Drawing on Kripkean identity theory,⁹ Adams proposes that the evil preceding our existence—more or less—is a metaphysically necessary condition of our existence. Adams writes,

I do not think it would have been possible, in the metaphysical or broadly logical sense that is relevant here, for me to exist in a world

7. Among Christians, and theists more generally, there are a variety of views about how and when God makes this offer. The reader can fill in these details concerning condition (2) in a manner that she takes to be consonant with the actions of a perfect being.

8. Historically, a number of celebrated Christian theologians—among them Duns Scotus, Karl Barth, and Gottfried Leibniz—have attempted to make sense of the biblical idea (cf. Jer. 1:4–5, Eph. 1:4–5, and Ps. 139:16) that God has chosen human persons individually prior to their conception.

9. Adams references Saul A. Kripke, "Naming and Necessity," in *Semantics of Natural Language*, ed. Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1972), 312–14.

that differed much from the actual world in the evils occurring in the parts of history that contain my roots. . . . My identity is established by my beginning. It has been suggested [by Kripke, according to Adams] that no one who was not produced from the same individual egg and sperm cells as I was could have been me. . . . If so, the identity of those gametes presumably depends in turn on their beginnings and on the identity of my parents, which depends on the identity of the gametes from which they came, and so on.¹⁰

If our identities are established by our beginnings, Adams takes it that “A multiplicity of interacting chances, including evils great and small, affect which people mate, which gametes find each other, and which children come into being.”¹¹

It does not take much to affect procreation history. Any actions that have a significant effect on the movement of matter will, given enough time, have an effect on who comes to exist. This is because over time a “butterfly effect”—which can be readily demonstrated in our best weather prediction models—will exponentially multiply the amount of matter that has its movements and thus locations changed by even very slight variations in initial conditions, and eventually this will affect the movement of people enough to influence who conceives with whom, when they conceive, and therefore by which sperm and egg they conceive, and thus who subsequently comes to exist.

“The farther we go back in history,” writes Adams, “the larger the proportion of evils to which we owe our being; for the causal nexus relevant to our individual genesis widens as we go back in time. We almost certainly would never have existed had there not been just about the same evils as actually occurred in a large part of human history.”¹² This will include both moral evils (lying, stealing, cheating, and killing) and so-called natural evils (earthquakes, tornadoes, diseases, and droughts). It will also include the history relevant to the coming to be of the human race. The truth of any hypothesis about human origins—the gradual emergence of full humanity through evolutionary means, the miraculous raising of hominoids to full humanity, or the direct divine creation of the original humans—would have a major effect on the causal history of the world and therefore on the procreative history of the world. Whatever the truth about human origins, it is likely that none of us could have existed had the truth about human origins been significantly different.¹³

10. Adams, “Existence, Self-Interest, and the Problem of Evil,” 67–8. Adams and I use “world” in the technical sense of a maximal state of affairs.

11. *Ibid.*, 66.

12. *Ibid.*

13. None of this implies that we cannot one day live in an eternal state where there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev. 21:4 (NIV)). It is an individual’s *origin* that establishes his identity. Once he comes to exist, however, his *future* can take many different forms while maintaining personal identity.

This is why, when Gottfried Leibniz considers in *Confessio philosophi* whether we should be indignant that God did not respond to Adam and Eve's fall by replacing them with better creatures who would not have transmitted sin and its consequent suffering down through the generations, he answers that

if God had done that, sin having been taken away, an entirely different series of things, entirely different combinations of circumstances, persons, and marriages, and entirely different persons would have been produced and, consequently, sin having been taken away or extinguished, they themselves would not have existed. They therefore have no reason to be indignant that Adam and Eve sinned and, much less, that God permitted sin to occur, since they must rather credit their own existence to God's tolerance of those very sins.¹⁴

Leibniz goes on to compare those who hold such indignation with a half-noble son who is "irritated with his father because he had married a woman unequal in rank . . . not thinking that if his father had married someone else, not he, but some other man, would have come into the world."¹⁵

An objection surfaces at this point: Not everyone will accept the claim that we could not have existed had the events preceding our physical origination been significantly different. There is at least one theory of personal identity that rejects *any* connection between personal identity and physical origination. This is a creationist theory according to which human persons are immaterial souls that exist logically (and in some versions temporally) prior to their embodiment.¹⁶ On some versions of this view, not only is the immaterial soul the individuating feature of persons, but God can join any soul to any or no lump of matter as he likes, in any universe that he chooses to create.

If a theory of this sort is correct, then it is not true that suffering (let alone the precise suffering of the actual world) is essential for the existence of the specific community of actual-world human inhabitants (nor, for that matter, for the existence of any other human persons God could have created); God could have gotten the very same individuals in possible worlds with significantly less evil and suffering, or even with no evil and suffering at all.

However, even if God could have created us in a very different universe with a very different physical origination, it is another question whether his doing so would have been good *for us*. What we value in life is not just our metaphysical identity but the specific projects, relationships, commitments, experiences, memories, hopes, and aspirations that constitute the concrete

14. G. W. Leibniz, "The Confession of a Philosopher," in *Confessio philosophi: Papers concerning the Problem of Evil, 1671–1678*, ed. and trans. Robert C. Sleigh Jr. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 107.

15. *Ibid.*

16. This theory has been endorsed in various forms by Plato, René Descartes, Joseph Butler, Thomas Reid, Roderick Chisholm, and Richard Swinburne, among others.

content of our lives and in which we have found meaning. Adams suggests that because of the way the potential for evil and suffering is inextricable from so much of what we value in life, a significant alteration in God's policy of evil allowance would have made our lives in such alternative universes radically and fundamentally different from our actual lives. It would have made our lives so different with respect to what we care about that, plausibly, we lack a rational self-interest in those alternative lives.¹⁷ William Hasker reflects, on similar grounds, that if we are glad that we exist (or glad that those we love exist), then "preferring [an alternative] life to one's actual life might be nearly as difficult as preferring not to have lived at all."¹⁸ These thoughts raise questions about whether and to what extent God could have wronged us by his current policy of evil-and-suffering allowance if under a different policy the concrete content of our lives would have been so different that to wish for one of those alternative lives is to wish away most of what we actually care about and are glad about.

This response requires further development before it can be properly assessed, and I plan to return to it elsewhere. But it suggests that something akin to Non-Identity Theodicy may remain plausible even if the independence of personal identity from physical origination is affirmed and (1) is denied.

That said, most people *do* accept the claim that physical origination affects personal identity. This claim will be plausible to many who deny the existence of an immaterial soul and to those who hold that a human person consists essentially of both a specific body and a specific soul. It may also be plausible to some who believe human persons *are* immaterial souls—for example, to some holding a traducian view (according to which the soul is generated from the specific souls of the parents during the reproductive process) or to some holding an emergent view (according to which the soul results in some way from the structure and/or functioning of the human organism). This claim may even be plausible to some who believe human persons are immaterial souls and hold creationist views of the soul. Hasker notes that "Thomists, for instance, hold that the soul, as a form, is individuated by the matter which it informs; the soul is created as the soul of *this particular body*."¹⁹

17. See Adams, "Existence, Self-Interest, and the Problem of Evil," 74–5. A related challenge to Non-Identity Theodicy is that if human persons are immaterial souls and souls are featureless—as they are sometimes thought to be—it is hard to see what reasons God could have for loving that would be particular to specific individuals. But God's motivating love should be understood as tracking more than bare metaphysical identity. Adams reminds us that "To love a person . . . is not just to care about a bare metaphysical identity"; it is also to care for her "projects" and "aspirations," finding hope and value in particular "actions" and "experiences" ("Love and the Problem of Evil," 246).

18. Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 21. Hasker attributes this point to Robert Rosenthal.

19. *Ibid.*, 11 (emphasis in original).

The many who agree that significant changes in the causal history of the world would result in changes in the physical origins of human persons and therefore in the identities of which persons come to exist might reasonably conclude, then, that God has not wronged us by creating a universe in which we are offered a great eternal life rather than creating one in which we never would have lived.

We might wish that God would discontinue his policy of evil allowance once *we* come to exist, but Adams suggests that no person or generation has the right to special pleading.²⁰ By enabling our existence, the policy has been good for us on the whole, and so morality does not seem to require that in our lifetimes it should be discontinued.²¹

This brings us to condition (3) of Non-Identity Theodicy. Even if God does not *wrong* anyone by allowing evil to occur, whether creating and sustaining an evil-producing universe reveals a defect in character is another question. Perhaps in creating a universe that includes great evil and suffering God displays a vice.²² Perhaps, for instance, his motivation for creating an evil-prone universe is so that he can play hero, or because he finds violence entertaining: “As flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods. They kill us for their sport.”²³

Non-Identity Theodicy resists this suggestion by claiming that God is motivated in creating by the virtue of grace. Adams identifies a gracious person as one with “a disposition to love which is not dependent on the merit of the person loved,”²⁴ one who “sees what is valuable in the person he loves, and does not worry about whether it is more or less valuable than what could be found in someone else he might have loved.”²⁵

God’s primary creative choice, according to Non-Identity Theodicy, is of a group of particular persons whom God finds lovable. Because God is gracious, his desire to love us is not on the condition that we are more valuable than other creatures he could have created or that our existence allows for the maximization of overall world value. Understanding God as gracious in this way is consonant with the tendency of religious worshippers to express gratitude to God for taking a particular interest in them despite their comparative deficiencies—“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”²⁶ The virtue of grace may be foreign to some ethical sensitivities (to those of Plato and Leibniz, for instance), but

20. Adams, “Existence, Self-Interest, and the Problem of Evil,” 70–1.

21. William Hasker affirms a similar point on page 19 of *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*.

22. Adams notes (“Must God Create the Best?,” 323) that Plato suggests the vice of envy in *Timaeus*, 29e–30a.

23. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, act 4, scene 1.

24. Adams, “Must God Create the Best?,” 324.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Ps. 8:4 (NRSV). Adams uses this verse to make a related point in “Must God Create the Best?,” 324–5.

if it is accepted as a component of the ethical ideal, then desiring to create and love persons vulnerable to significant evil and suffering can be just as fitting with the abundance of divine generosity as desiring to create and love the most valuable, most useful, or most well-off persons God could create.

Adams likens God's decision to create the actual universe to Adams's own unabashed preference for "the preservation of the human race . . . to its ultimate replacement by a more excellent species,"²⁷ to human parents preferring to procreate a normal child rather than a genetically enhanced superchild, to an activist's preference for a free society even if a totalitarian one would be better overall, and to a person breeding goldfish rather than more excellent beings. All of these examples are most naturally construed as including preferences not aimed at maximizing value, and the first three examples can be naturally construed as including preferences not aimed at minimizing suffering. Intuitions are controversial here, but I join Adams in not thinking that he, the parents, the activist, or the goldfish breeder have—under otherwise normal circumstances—displayed a vice.

Conjoining the belief that God has not wronged those he has created with the claim that God's world choice is motivated by the virtue of grace rather than by a defect in character, we have the outline of a full theodicy. In sum, the postulated justifying goods of Non-Identity Theodicy are individual human persons, and accepting evil and suffering as an inevitable consequence of attaining these goods is consistent with divine morality and virtue so long as the human persons are brought into existence because God desires to love them,²⁸ they could not have existed without the actual divine policy of evil-and-suffering allowance, and they are offered very worthwhile lives overall.

Is God Irrational according to Non-Identity Theodicy?

According to Non-Identity Theodicy, no one is wronged by God's creative choice of this universe. Those who never come to exist are not wronged because nonexistent beings cannot be wronged. Those who do come to exist are not wronged because they could not have existed otherwise and are offered great lives overall. Moreover, God's creation of our universe does not reveal a defect in character because it is motivated by the virtue of grace.

27. Adams, "Existence, Self-Interest, and the Problem of Evil," 71.

28. Because I claim that God is motivated in creating by a *desire* to love individuals rather than by love for them *per se*, I am not committed to the possibility of loving non-existent objects. William Hasker raises a concern about this when he writes, "Prior to [God] making the decision, there *are no* creatures for God to love; there is only a set of abstract possibilities" (*The Triumph of God over Evil: Theodicy for a World of Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 84).

However, some who accept that on the assumptions of Non-Identity Theodicy God has not wronged anyone and is motivated virtuously may, nevertheless, have a lingering worry that there is something ethically problematic or irrational about deliberately choosing to bring about a worse state of affairs involving a great deal of suffering and injustice in preference to a better state of affairs. Isn't the God of Non-Identity Theodicy like a person who—given a choice between many mortgage packages—wastes his money by choosing one considerably worse than the best?²⁹

Non-Identity Theodicy suggests that God acts as a lover of particular individuals, and further that a lover can have significant reasons for acting, in virtue of being a lover, other than those that impartially maximize general value. Perhaps government officials have no place making bureaucratic decisions based on love for individuals. But God is no bureaucrat, according to Non-Identity Theodicy, and he makes some of his most significant decisions—including decisions about which type of universe to create—based on love for particular individuals.

Underlying this approach to theodicy is a resistance to invoking value maximization as the ethical or rational ideal,³⁰ and also to approaches to decision-making that weight the instrumental and comparative value of persons over valuing those persons and relationships with those persons for their own sakes. Whether we are instrumentally necessary for the *best* world God could have created (as Leibniz would have it), for a world *better* than many others (as Alvin Plantinga would have it),³¹ or for *greater* goods such as meaningful free will and being of use (as Richard Swinburne would have it) is not of primary importance.³² If creation is primarily an act of love, then evaluating that act primarily on comparisons of value is a category mistake. According to Non-Identity Theodicy, God is not just after benefits *for* objects of love, but rather he is after the individuals who *are* the objects of love. He is after them because he finds them lovable, and lovable as a quality is very differ-

29. This raises the question of whether there is a best possible world. I am inclined to believe there is not—for any possible world, something of value could be added to that world to make a better possible world. If there is no best possible world, then God cannot be morally obligated to actualize a best possible world. However, even if there were a best possible world, I do not believe, for reasons I will go on to discuss, that God would be obligated to actualize it.

30. Adams writes, "I do not think it is best, or an inescapable part of the ethical ideal, always to prefer what is best" (*Finite and Infinite Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 133).

31. See Alvin Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa,'" in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

32. Adams wrote "Must God Create the Best?" (1972)—his first article with direct import for Non-Identity Theodicy—at a time when it was common for philosophers to assume a God who created would have to create a best of all possible worlds. Writing in 1969, for instance, Roderick Chisholm says that "We may assume that if an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent deity were to create a world, then that world would be at least as good as any other possible world" ("The Defeat of Good and Evil," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 42 (1969): 36).

ent from a measurement of value. An economic model—whereby costs are evaluated solely for their instrumental use in acquiring greater goods—may be useful when buying a home, but I agree with Adams that “In some areas of human life . . . and particularly where certain kinds of personal relationship are concerned, the economic model is grossly inadequate for an understanding of what is involved in being good to people.”³³

Ideal love is an essential component of ethical perfection, and ideal love is particular in that it prizes its objects for their own sakes, not merely or primarily as a way of obtaining further ends.³⁴ This particularity of ideal love supports the conclusion that there can be rational preferences for situations that are less good on the whole than others one could aim for. One who has a genuine love for truthfulness, for instance, will at least sometimes prefer not to lie even when his honesty is not instrumental for a greater good and results in a comparatively worse state of affairs. Similarly, those who love one another sometimes have rational preferences to be worse-off together rather than better-off apart. I read the “for better *or* for worse” in many marriage vows in this way. Far from being reproachable, I take preferences of this sort to be closely related to some of the best forms of human relationship.

When I married my wife, Jo, I did this because I love her for her own sake and I love our relationship for its own sake. It wasn't just that I decided life would be *better* with her than without her; it wasn't just that I decided she compared favorably with others of her general type; it wasn't just that I judged her to be instrumentally useful for attaining further ends. The most relevant affections are more particular than these assessments. I love her and our relationship as ends in themselves.³⁵ I desire *life-together* with her, for better *or* for worse. If I were not willing to accept any loss of overall value for the sake of my relationship with Jo, this would call into serious question the genuineness of my love for her.³⁶ Non-Identity Theodicy can be understood as exploring the related idea that God created out of a loving desire for life-together with a community of individuals.

Interestingly, this emphasis on the particularity of love is not only alien to but explicitly at odds with the ethical assumptions underlying much contemporary theodicy. Swinburne is explicit that he takes the primary assessments relevant to theodicy to be ones of comparative value, for instance

33. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 143.

34. Adams concurs when he writes, “Some measure of such a noninstrumental relational interest seems to me to be part of anything that would be recognized as a paradigm of *love* of any sort” (*ibid.*, 139).

35. Adams affirms this line of thought in an insightful passage: “Comparative reasons have something unappreciative about them . . . optimization and maximization are enemies of appreciation; and appreciation is part of the soul of love. This may seem paradoxical to our competitive souls, which sometimes feel most appreciated when we are favorably compared with others. But in truth, being placed on a scale, even at the top of it, is as such quite different from being loved or appreciated for oneself” (*ibid.*, 169).

36. Cf. *ibid.*, 151ff.

when he writes that “the issue of whether the goods are great enough to justify the bad states which make them possible is the crux of the problem of evil.”³⁷ In fact, he goes so far as to claim that “A perfectly good being will never allow any morally bad state to occur if he can prevent it—except for the sake of a greater good.”³⁸ In doing so, Swinburne fails to appreciate that some of the most powerful expressions of love are those that accept bad states for the sake of particular people and particular relationships as ends in themselves, rather than for the sake of bringing about greater goods.

Moreover—setting aside concerns about the *sake* for which a bad state is allowed—it does not even seem to be a requirement of ethical or rational perfection to only allow bad states that are likely to be counterbalanced by greater goods. If one is not willing to make the sacrifices necessary to support a friend unless the overall expected value of making the sacrifices is positive, then it is doubtful that one genuinely loves the relationship or the person one is related to. It is in keeping with ideal love to sometimes be willing to make sacrifices for those you love when the goodness of the goods attained by those sacrifices is incommensurate with or even less than the badness of the sacrifices.

Not only is Swinburne’s condition not a necessary condition of perfect goodness as he claims it is, but I take it to be sufficient on at least two counts for less-than-perfect goodness.³⁹ Eleonore Stump likewise seems to neglect the justificatory possibilities of relationships loved for their own sakes when she assumes that divinely permitted evils can only be justified if they are “outweighed” by the resultant goods,⁴⁰ and William Rowe does the same when he assumes that a God “would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.”⁴¹

A greater-goods condition is almost universally assumed in the contemporary literature on the problem of evil, and most follow Rowe in assuming that evils not leading to greater goods are appropriately termed “pointless evils.”⁴² But, as I have been suggesting, it is far from obvious that evils lead-

37. Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 239.

38. *Ibid.*, 13. Later in the same work Swinburne puts it this way: It must be the case that “the expected value of allowing the bad states to occur is positive, i.e. roughly that the goods which they make possible are at least a tiny bit better than the bad states necessary for them are bad” (223).

39. Another concern about Swinburne’s condition is that it does not seem to take into account that one may sometimes have an obligation to allow an evil even when it will not lead to a greater good. This can be the case, for instance, when one has promised not to interfere or when interference would be beyond one’s rightful involvement. Perhaps Swinburne is thinking that God would not make such a promise and that nothing is outside of his rightful ruling.

40. Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 410.

41. William L. Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 336.

42. *Ibid.*, 337.

ing to lesser or incommensurate goods valued for their own sakes are necessarily pointless.

There are important ethical differences between house mortgages and human persons; they are valued in very different ways. Contemporary analytic theodicy has generally been conducted along an economic ethical paradigm that uses a metric to weigh the moral value of consequences. As such, it has underemphasized the valuing of people and relationships for their own sakes which is essential to ideal love. If ideal love is a significant component of divine rationality and ethical perfection, as I believe it is, Adams is correct to recommend a significant shift in emphasis away from the instrumentalism and comparativism of an economic model and towards love and grace, and his doing so does not depict God as irrational.

As a final response to this charge of irrationality, note that Non-Identity Theodicy is consistent with God bringing into existence creatures other than those we are aware of. Even if you think it would be irrational to aim solely for the inhabitants of earth in creating, Non-Identity Theodicy is consistent with God creating far more excellent creatures, either in other universes or in other parts of our universe.⁴³ If God has created a range of good creatures—and among them some of the most excellent—then he is still less vulnerable to the charge that he has been irrational in not creating better beings or beings who suffer less; for all we know, he has.

Non-Identity Theodicy and Free Will

As I have outlined Non-Identity Theodicy to this point, God aims to produce specific persons. But for God to will a cosmic system because it will produce these rather than those specific persons, God would have to have strong reason to believe in advance of creation that it will in fact produce these rather than those. Given the extreme sensitivity of procreation history, God could only have such knowledge by deterministic control or Molinist control. (Molinism is the view that there is a true counterfactual corresponding to every possible situation in which a possible free creature is faced with a free decision, and that God knows the truth values of all of these counterfactuals. (In other words, although our actions are free and undetermined, God knew, prior to creation, how we would freely act in any circumstance he could have put us in.) Such counterfactuals are allegedly contingent truths God has to work with when deciding whether and which universe to create. God's knowledge of the truth values of these counterfactuals is referred to as middle knowledge.) If the cosmic system includes only natural causes, then

43. In fact, the principle of plenitude—according to which all possible kinds of being would be created—had significant philosophical influence from ancient times until the eighteenth century. A. O. Lovejoy documents the history of this principle in his *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936).

God could have the requisite knowledge by deterministically controlling the history of the world. If the system includes libertarian voluntary causes as well, then God would need middle knowledge; the combination of middle knowledge and a deterministic control of natural causes would allow God to guide the unfolding of history with the precision necessary to produce specific persons.

However, on libertarian non-Molinist assumptions (that is, the assumptions that we have undetermined free will and God does not have middle knowledge),⁴⁴ God could not know enough in advance about the future free and contingent choices of persons to ensure—or even make probable—that he would wind up with the specific community of human persons he was motivated to bestow grace upon in the first place.⁴⁵ Even seemingly trivial free choices—for example, to take the scenic route to work or to stop to pick up a piece of trash—are enough to significantly alter which sperm and eggs join in conception, when they do so, and the circumstances under which their joining proceeds.⁴⁶ This exposes that the version of Non-Identity Theodicy I have outlined to this point is logically committed to either theological determinism or Molinism, whereby God chooses at the point of creation among fully determinate possible worlds.

That Non-Identity Theodicy is compatible with theological determinism (that is, that conditions (1), (2),⁴⁷ and (3) can be met despite a commitment to theological determinism) is a significant result. Swinburne seems to speak on behalf of many contemporary theodocists in asserting that “It would . . . be very difficult to construct a satisfactory theodicy which did not rely on the doctrine of human free will”⁴⁸ and that “The central core of any theodicy must . . . be the ‘free-will defence.’”⁴⁹ William Hasker is in unequivocal agreement: “Theological determinism is emphatically rejected,

44. Some think God does not have middle knowledge because there are no truths to be known about how someone would freely act in a given situation prior to their actually freely acting in that situation.

45. Even if (without deterministic or Molinist control) God could not have this knowledge *in advance*, it may be that he has this knowledge timelessly. Nevertheless, because this timeless knowledge would be logically posterior to the free human choices in question, this knowledge would not be of use to God in deciding which universe to create.

46. If human persons are the first inhabitants of earth with non-Molinist free will, then maybe God still could have aimed individually for some of the first human persons. Even so, the suffering of countless subsequent generations could not be plausibly justified by God’s intention to create a relatively small number of human individuals at the commencement of the species.

47. Satisfying condition (2) of Non-Identity Theodicy may be challenging for the theist committed to theological determinism. But she is not without options. She will have to argue either that there is a morally significant sense in which someone can be *offered* a great eternal life even if they are determined to reject that offer, or that God ensures that even those who are determined to reject him nevertheless have lives that are worth living overall, or that ultimately no one will reject God, or that condition (2) should be weakened so that not every person needs to be offered a great life in order for Non-Identity Theodicy to be successful.

48. Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 241.

49. Swinburne, *Is There a God?*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 86.

not least because of the difficulty—the insuperable difficulty, as I believe—it creates for any attempt to deal constructively with the problem of evil.”⁵⁰ If a non-identity approach to theodicy has anywhere near the promise I have suggested it has, this calls into question the widespread supposed wedlock of theodicy with libertarianism.

This loosening of theodicy from libertarian free will also guards against extreme forms of anthropocentrism. As Adams suggests, “The perspective of omniscience must be less bound to the human than ours, and the creator of a universe of which humanity occupies so small a part may be presumed interested in other things in it besides us.”⁵¹ Unlike free-will-based theodicies, Non-Identity Theodicy can, without theoretical complication, spread its net of divine interest as widely as it likes. Whereas plausibly only human persons (among earthly beings) have the sort of significant libertarian free will that takes central place in most theodicies, fairly narrow origin-constraints on identity are as plausible for stars, mountains, plants, and animals as they are for human persons.

Animal suffering, therefore, including any prehuman animal suffering, can be accounted for not only by the particular human persons it allows to exist, but also by the particular animals God desires to exist. Returning to the three conditions of Non-Identity Theodicy, animal suffering affects which human persons come to exist (condition (1)), but it also affects which animals come to exist. Even if there is a special form of love God can share with human persons as free beings (condition (3)), God nevertheless has affection for animals and creates them out of a desire to appreciate and bestow value upon them.

It is a disputed point among Christians and other theists whether the animals that exist in the present age will partake in an afterlife, but it is plausibly within the vast resources of omnipotence for God to give each animal a life worth living (or even very worth living) on the whole (condition (2)). One may object that some animals perish from starvation or other forms of suffering very early in life. However, even the short lives of these animals will have an effect on the movement of matter and therefore, over time, on which humans come to exist. Perhaps it is a great good *for an animal* if that animal is used by God for his purpose of bringing human persons into existence. But if some animals have earthly lives that are not worth living, God can ensure that they exist after death in a long enough and good enough state for condition (2) to be satisfied.

This suggests that with no more than slight amendments, the three conditions of Non-Identity Theodicy can account plausibly for animal suffering. If you believe that animals can enjoy an afterlife, then the conditions of Non-Identity Theodicy can account for animal suffering even without making

50. Hasker, *The Triumph of God over Evil*, 93.

51. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 148.

reference to human persons (or any other nondivine beings, such as angels). This may be attractive to anyone concerned for animals to be treated as ends in themselves (as opposed to mere means to benefit others) in the context of theodicy.

A Second Version of Non-Identity Theodicy

If one has arguments that favor the existence of non-Molinist libertarian free will or thinks that determinism or even Molinism would make God too directly involved in the bringing about of evil for him to be perfectly good, then he or she will be inclined to reject the version of Non-Identity Theodicy I have presented. However, I believe Non-Identity Theodicy can be reformulated to be made plausible on non-Molinist libertarian assumptions about free will. If I am correct, some version of Non-Identity Theodicy will be available to the theist regardless of his or her assumptions about free will.

Without middle knowledge or deterministic control of the universe, God's motivation in creating cannot be love for specific individuals. But even if (on non-Molinist libertarian assumptions) God cannot aim for specific individuals, perhaps he can nonetheless aim for specific being-*types*, and perhaps this too can be a loving motivation consonant with having a flawless character and not wronging those he creates. Moreover, because plausibly the individuals who actually exist could not have originated as other being-*types*, this remains for God a non-identity choice—one that brings into existence people who otherwise could not have existed. Condition (1) of Non-Identity Theodicy is therefore satisfied.

Likewise, the assumption of non-Molinist libertarianism will not impede Non-Identity Theodicy's ability to meet condition (2). The denial of theological determinism may even make it easier for those who believe in certain theories of hell to maintain that condition (2) is satisfied.⁵²

That leaves condition (3). On this second version of Non-Identity Theodicy, God can be likened to human procreators. Choices to procreate are non-identity choices. However, even in cases of well-informed and fully voluntary human procreation, parents cannot know enough about their future children to aim for specific individuals. Nevertheless, they can aim for a being of a certain type—for a human child or for their biological child—with the determination to love whichever individual of that type they end up procreating.

Intuitions suggest that there is a morally significant sense in which human parents can procreate out of a desire to love their future children, despite only aiming in procreating for a being-*type*. They recognize what is valuable

52. Cf. note 47 above.

in the type they aim for and act out of a desire to love whichever individual of that type they ultimately produce.

Analogously, so long as God has control enough to aim for specific types of beings,⁵³ then even without deterministic or Molinist control God can be motivated in creating by a desire to love the unspecified individuals of one or more being-types, irrespective of whether those being-types are better or worse than other being-types God could have created. I take it that if there is a God, human persons are among the being-types he has aimed for in creating and sustaining the universe.

The remaining question is whether evil comparable to the evil of the actual world is necessary for us to be the type of being we are. Condition (3) is only satisfied if a universe prone to evil and suffering is a necessary condition of producing beings of our type. I believe that it is. Three of the most significant aspects of human persons as a being-type are human psychology, human biology, and the narrative of humanity,⁵⁴ and without an evil-and-suffering-prone universe, each of these would look very different.

It strains the imagination to think of what human psychology would be like if we lived in a world without serious evils. Part of what it is to be us is to be the fragile beings that we are, vulnerable to violation and destruction. So much of our meaning-making systems—what we value, desire, participate in, and invest in—depends on our living in an environment prone to much evil. Resultantly, so much of our psyche is dominated by denying, worrying about, preventing, responding to, and dealing with actual evils that any beings born into and maturing in a world with much less evil would be radically psychologically different from us.

Likewise, for us to be the type of being we are under a narrative description, that narrative would have to include stories of false motives and bad decisions that have been at the root of many of the major turns in human history. It would also have to include external destruction such as natural disasters, human diseases, and wars.⁵⁵ This is not to say that God loves these aspects of the human narrative; he may regret and even hate them. Rather, God loves beings of our type, and being our type is deeply interwoven with the narrative of human history. This is evidenced by the tendency of all hu-

53. I take it that most religious traditions that attribute to God the power to create universes and perform miracles will be happy to attribute to him a level of control sufficient for directing the unfolding of history to include certain being-types.

54. This is affirmed by the fact that three of the most prominent theories of personal identity are psychological, biological, and narrative theories, reflecting that what human persons value about themselves as individuals are—among other things—their psychological states such as memories, beliefs, intentions, desires, hopes, and faith, the biological organisms that they are continuous with, and the integrated stories running through their lives. Moreover, good lovers seek to help their beloveds to see and appreciate what is lovable in them, so our valuing of these aspects of humanity is some evidence for God's valuing of them.

55. This does not entail that God created a universe that would inevitably produce these forms of external destruction. See note 56 for further discussion of this point.

man cultures to identify themselves by and set up manifold structures and practices for the remembrance and commemoration of events, objects, and individuals important to the history of our race. No narrative that did not include many of the sorts of things that would be key features of any good documentary on the human race could plausibly be considered the narrative of our being-type.

Finally, is the extent of actual evil necessary for us to be the type of being we are under a biological description? Technically, perhaps not. Human persons seem uniquely capable (among earthly creatures) of perpetrating and suffering some of the worst forms of actual evil. Only human persons have been capable of sex trafficking children, for instance, or of feeling prolonged hatred toward oneself. Any processes or events that helped produce and hence preceded our biological-type could not have included suffering that is conditional on the concurrent existence of our type. Moreover, with the resources of omnipotence, perhaps God could have miraculously protected our biological-type from suffering once we came to exist. Therefore, it may be within the power of God both to produce and to sustain beings of our biological-type without allowing some of the worst forms of evil and suffering.

However, this would be to get our being-type under one description at the expense of the other two. Perhaps such persons would be the same species in a biological sense, but if they were continuously supernaturally protected from evil from the commencement of our species, they would not share the psychology or narrative of our being-type.

Moreover, even if human suffering is not necessary for our biological type to exist, plausibly the natural processes out of which that suffering emerges are. Our biological lineage and makeup would not look nearly the same without the laws of thermodynamics having underlain physical systems as they have, and therefore without our world having had the natural threats to survival that it has had. Maybe God could have eradicated these processes once human persons came to exist, but there is good reason to think he would not have.

Many women value pregnancy intensely. Part of their love for their children is valuing the processes and events out of which their children came to be. Likewise, the natural processes that God cares about in caring for us may be much richer than we are apt to assume. Part of God's love for our type would be valuing the natural world out of which we came, and this is reason to think he would be resistant to discarding major features of that world as soon as human life had commenced.

Even if non-Molinist human free will means that God could not aim for specific human persons in creating and sustaining this universe, he could nonetheless aim for specific being-types, and one side effect of aiming for our being-type under psychological, narrative, and biological descriptions would be evil and suffering similar to that of the actual world. That one day

we may exist in an evil-free environment does not undermine these conclusions, because part of what it is to be of our type is to be headed for redemption in various respects.⁵⁶

My conclusion, therefore, is that if God creates out of a holistic love for beings of our type, we should expect his creation to have the suffering-producing tendencies of the actual world. As we have seen, all three conditions of a successful Non-Identity Theodicy can be met even on non-Molinist libertarian assumptions about free will.

Divine Creation and Human Procreation

The plausibility of the justification offered by Non-Identity Theodicy is aided by an analogy between divine creation and human procreation.

In both cases, we have creators choosing to bring beings into existence when they know those beings will suffer significantly. Human parents who voluntarily have children do something that they know will result in serious suffering, because serious suffering accompanies even the most fortunate of human lives. Even more than that, they procreate knowing full well that one day their child will suffer death. Arguably, death (or the dying process) is one of the worst evils. Despite this, most people believe that voluntary human procreation is not uncommonly morally permissible. The question is on what grounds they believe this. In other words, how does human procreation fare with respect to the conditions of morally acceptable creation recommended by Non-Identity Theodicy?

Procreation meets condition (1). If my parents had chosen not to procreate, I never would have existed. And indeed this does seem important to the morality of procreation. If parents had the option—*ceteris paribus*—of having their very same children without them suffering severely and ultimately dying, and they didn't take it, this would call into serious question the morality of their procreative act. That the one who suffers as a result of a given

56. Some theists may worry that God could not be aiming for our being-type, not because they believe things will be different in the end but because they believe things were different in the beginning. If humanity has fallen from some form of original righteousness, this could be taken to imply that, insofar as God aimed for a human being-type, he aimed for it under a pre-fall suffering-free description and not under the current description we have freely fallen into. But I think this conclusion is avoidable. Even if God did not desire for humanity to fall, one reason he could be taken to have *allowed* a fall and its consequences is that he desired to bring into existence and to love beings of our biological, psychological, and narrative description. God can love many different beings under many different descriptions. He could love the first human persons in their condition of original righteousness and subsequent human persons in their fallen condition.

I also take a fall of humanity to be reconcilable with the Molinist or deterministic version of Non-Identity Theodicy. A fall of humanity, as a significant event in history, would affect which individuals come to exist subsequently. God therefore could be taken to have allowed a fall in part in order to aim for specific individuals that he desired to create and love.

action could not exist had that action not been performed can have a very significant effect on the morality of bringing human persons into existence.⁵⁷

Procreation does not fare as well as divine creation with respect to justificatory condition (2). Only God can offer to each person an eternity in which any evil endured will be infinitely outweighed. The best human procreators can offer to a new child is a probably worthwhile life. Because I don't think morally permissible procreation relies on certain theistic beliefs about the afterlife, I believe that the good of a merely natural human existence—limited in its duration, with the risks of misery that accompany it, and with death as its bad end—is sometimes sufficient for justifying human procreation. With omniscience and omnipotence, God is capable of offering to each person a life such that physical death is not the end it appears to be, and such that all but the earliest fraction of human life will be spent in great happiness and fulfillment. God is in a more favorable position than human procreators both for the afterlife that only he can give and for the burden of final death that only he can take away.

This leaves us with how human procreation fares with respect to condition (3). Again, it fares not nearly as well as divine creation. According to Non-Identity Theodicy, God creates out of a desire to love those who come to exist and to offer them a great eternal life. One of God's primary reasons for creating is a desire for the good of the specific persons who will come to exist. But even in morally favorable cases of human procreation, the reasons human persons have for procreating are complex, and a concern for the good of the one who will come to exist is not always central. Sometimes human persons procreate for selfish reasons, and a concern for the good of the one who will come to exist is absent altogether, or considered only as an afterthought. As David Benatar recognizes, parental motivations for procreating are often at least partly self-serving: to "satisfy biological desires," to "find fulfillment," to ensure "an insurance policy for old age" and an influence beyond the grave.⁵⁸ Indeed, many times parents don't initially intend to procreate at all; procreation can be an unintended side-effect of physical desire or relationship bonding. Yet human procreation is in general morally permissible despite faring significantly worse than divine creation with respect to Non-Identity Theodicy's proposed conditions for the morally acceptable creation of beings vulnerable to significant suffering.

Someone might object that a morally relevant distinction favoring human procreation over divine creation is that human persons are not responsible for the reproductive system within which they procreate, and that it may be unfair to expect human persons to renounce their natural functions.

57. That the good of worthwhile human life has this marked justificatory power also helps to make sense of the intuition that wrongful-life lawsuits are only morally compelling in exceptional circumstances.

58. David Benatar, "Why It Is Better Never to Come into Existence," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1997): 351.

However, even if being stuck with a certain frame makes acts of human procreation more understandable, I doubt this diminishes human responsibility so far as to account for the extent of the moral freedom to procreate that many find strongly intuitive. For most of us, the frame we inherit makes lying, cheating, stealing, and a host of other bad acts come just as naturally as procreation, perhaps now even more naturally in places of readily available contraception. Just as our natural inclinations to such acts do little to diminish their immorality, our natural tendency to procreate cannot morally excuse us from the harm resulting from procreation.

Moreover, God may be working with a similar frame. It is consonant with Non-Identity Theodicy that God's desire to create the actual-world inhabitants is as strong as or stronger than any human desires resulting in procreation, and Non-Identity Theodicy suggests that it is a necessary truth that creating those inhabitants would result in grave suffering. The divine case is then much like the human procreation case with the exception that God has significant moral advantages at both the beginning of human life (where he can create out of pure motivations) and the end of human life (where he can offer an eternity of fulfillment beyond the grave).

A second objection claims that human procreation *per se* is not the appropriate analogy, that divine creation of this evil-prone universe is more like a parent intentionally conceiving a child with a congenital disease than like a normal case of procreation. However, there are a number of reasons to be morally suspicious of this sort of abnormal procreation that do not easily transfer to its divine analogue. Parents' desire to aim for a disease-affected child may reflect questionable motives for bringing a child into existence, and therefore may call into further question their fulfillment of condition (3). The parents may be using the child as a means to an end—say fame, or the chance to play hero, or fulfilling some other psychological or financial need of theirs—rather than valuing the child for her own sake. This concern about an immoral instrumentalism helps explain why many would have a similar aversion to the intentional conception of children with Down syndrome, despite the fact that children with this condition arguably suffer no more on average than normal children.⁵⁹

Moreover, in cases of intentionally conceiving a child with a disease that causes great suffering, the parents may have good reason to doubt that the child's natural life will be worthwhile for her all things considered; that is, they may have less reason to be confident that they can meet condition (2). With God, though, we need not have concerns about suspect motivations,

59. Likewise, a concern about an immoral instrumentalism may help explain why some have intuitions that it is more plausibly morally permissible to intentionally procreate in a particularly dangerous part of the world than to intentionally procreate a deaf child, even if it is probable that the deaf child will suffer less overall than the child born in dangerous circumstances. The most common ways of imagining the details of such cases may leave the parents who procreate a deaf child more prone to a charge of immoral instrumentalism.

and, furthermore, we can be confident that he can offer even those born into serious suffering eternal lives that will be tremendous goods to them overall.⁶⁰

If the much more limited good of probably worthwhile natural human life is sufficient to justify the serious human suffering and death that accompanies human procreation, then I find it reasonable to think that the good of God-given human life—with its substantial moral advantages at both the beginning and the end of life—is sufficient for justifying divine permission of actual evils.

In sum, if you think human procreation is permissible, all the more so should you think divine creation of our universe is permissible. If you think God has acted immorally by creating human persons into an environment that produces suffering, then you have even more reason to think that human parents who procreate voluntarily are acting immorally, and therefore that many people would be justified in bringing wrongful-life lawsuits against their parents.

Conclusion: Distinctive Features of Non-Identity Theodicy

Non-Identity Theodicy is distinct as a theodicy in a number of ways. First, unlike most theodicies, it does not suggest that evil and suffering (or the possibility of evil and suffering) allows those who exist to live more valuable or more meaningful lives than the lives they would have lived without evil and suffering. Rather, it suggests that without evil and suffering those who exist could not have lived at all. The primary justificatory good proposed by Non-Identity Theodicy is not some benefit to life, but life itself; it is not some form of human existence, but human persons themselves and their status as objects of divine love. Human persons are thereby treated not as means to something else but as ends in themselves.

Second, Non-Identity Theodicy is distinct in that it is available to the theist regardless of her assumptions about the existence and nature of free will. Even the assumption of theological determinism does not undermine Non-Identity Theodicy in any obvious way.

Third, the plausibility of Non-Identity Theodicy is unaffected by one's assumptions about God's method of producing the human species. Whichever processes or events have led to the existence of the human race, those processes or events will have significantly affected the causal history and

60. A third reason that someone might be morally suspicious of the intentional conception of a child with a congenital deficiency is if they take human beings to have a moral obligation to respect God's purposes for human life by not engineering human life in certain ways. Again, God is not vulnerable to this objection, for he has no creator to whom he is obligated. For further discussion of this point, see Adams, "Must God Create the Best?," 330–2.

therefore the procreative history of the world. Whichever method God chose, therefore, can be explained by his desire to create and love the individuals or being-types made possible by that method. In particular, as I have discussed, this allows the Non-Identity Theodicy to account for animal suffering (including any pre-human animal suffering) without theoretical complication.

Finally, Non-Identity Theodicy is available to the theist regardless of her appraisal of most other theodicies. Non-Identity Theodicy suggests that the goodness of God can be defended because God creates and sustains the universe out of a desire to love and offer eternal life to people who otherwise could not have existed. But perhaps it is also true, as some versions of free-will-based theodicies suggest, that God permits rather than causes suffering, and that God has greater moral reason not to cause suffering than not to permit it. Or perhaps greater-goods theodicy is correct that God only allows evil to occur when it serves greater goods such as the opportunity to freely form our character and to be of help to others. More good reasons for performing an action generally make it more likely that one has morally sufficient reason for performing that action. If you think the reasons proffered by Non-Identity Theodicy are sufficient to justify God's allowance of suffering, then the cumulative reason provided by multiple theodicies may provide God with overdetermined justification. If you think the reasons recommended by Non-Identity Theodicy are morally significant but not sufficient, they may nevertheless contribute to a successful cumulative case theodicy. Thinking that no individual theodicy is sufficient to maintain the goodness of God in the face of evil and suffering is not sufficient to defeat the project of theodicy, for it would not be at all surprising if an infinitely wise and omniscient God had more than one reason for a decision as complex and significant as which universe to create and sustain.⁶¹

61. I plan to argue in a subsequent paper that considerations of non-identity can also challenge objections to theism in the forms of divine hiddenness and divine favoritism. If those to whom God seems hidden or to whom God has revealed himself less clearly than to others could not have existed had they not been born into the epistemic conditions they were in fact born into, then this raises questions about whether—so long as their lives are worth living overall—they have been treated unfairly or unlovingly by being born as such.