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Author: Keogh, Gary

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CONTEXT OF THEOLOGICAL METAETHICS:

A PRESUPPOSED GOOD AND A CONSPICIOUS EVIL

1.0 Introduction

The question of how accommodative Christian theology can be of modern science is one which has spawned many responses, extensively diverse and wide-ranging. What will be dealt with here is a specific reading of a specific element of this much broader dialectic, namely, how a particular reading of evolutionary ethics can contribute to a theological understanding of ethics. Whilst these two disciplines may not wholly and transparently align, evolutionary ethics can have a dynamic impact on Christian theological ethics. This is not necessarily a thesis about particular ethical challenges which evolutionary theory begets, though these are important and fascinating issues and will play a supporting if peripheral role. What is of more immediate concern is a schema for understanding good and evil, one which is appreciative of our current scientific understandings of the world though developed through theological and philosophical thought. In conjunction with the theories and doctrines of modern science, it will be shown how evolutionary ethics can offer a glimmer of hope in what may be interpreted as a nihilistic world.

In order for us to make visible what lies ahead, both in this text and in general, we must recall what has gone on before. This chapter will thus engage with the context out of which the core statements of the thesis will emerge. It will explore the rich traditions of theology and its understanding of good and evil, which has traditionally (though not universally) been presented under the umbrella themes of original sin and the fall. Distinct aspects of this understanding will be highlighted which evolutionary ethics can have

implications for. This will allow situating evolutionary ethics within the broader scheme of theological appreciations of good and evil. Specific, identifiable, and recurrent themes within theological frameworks for understanding ethics will provide focus in this chapter. The predominant theme that will be identified throughout this discussion will be the asymmetry in theological and philosophical frameworks for understanding good and evil; there was a discernible preoccupation with the question of evil, whereas goodness was always presumed. It will be argued that this asymmetrical presupposition is something that is in particular need of revision in light of evolutionary theory.

Preparatory to engaging with the subject matter, some brief notes clarifying semantics will be provided to assert what is meant when various terms are used; good, hope, sin, evil, etc. This will help to avoid grammatical confusion over the use of related terms. Section 1.2 will demonstrate how the questions of the origins of kindness did not feature in theological or philosophical discourse because theology had generally provided a satisfying answer; goodness has its origins in God. Therefore, it can be asserted that historical understandings of ethics are marked by a theo-centric character. Section 1.3 will then explore the preoccupation with the origins of evil that pervades theological discourse and represents one of the most debated issues in intellectual history. The theo-centric character of 'traditional' frameworks for understanding good and evil, and the debate on the origins of evil exemplify the asymmetrical understanding of a primordial goodness followed by sin/evil which begs explanation. The cyclical concepts of crime and punishment will be the focus of section 1.4 in relation to the prevalent expiatory understandings of sin, human nature and suffering. This will show how the notions of original sin and the fall became a predominant framework for what will be taken as the 'traditional Western Christian' framework for understanding good and evil. This framework stems largely from Augustine,

and thus may also be referred to as ‘Augustinian’ – though being mindful that as we shall see, Augustine was not its sole protagonist.

Section 1.5 will discuss the major influence these conceptions of good and evil have had in theology and philosophy. It will pinpoint where original sin has gained a marked foothold in philosophical thinking. The somewhat pessimistic vision of humanity as inclined towards evil can also be held to contrast with a more optimistic and hopeful reading of evolutionary ethics to be presented in later chapters. Similarly, the reigning imprint of the theme of punishment will be shown, but also critiqued in a somewhat Kantian manner, questioning whether the fear of punishment acts as a motive and thus negates the goodness of good actions. In preparation for a turn toward evolutionary theory then, section 1.6 will indicate where evolution presents problems for the more traditional understandings of good and evil.

1.1 Preliminary Semantic Clarifications

Although technically and grammatically different, certain terms will be used somewhat interchangeably throughout this dissertation. One cardinal assumption of this thesis is that the meaning of ‘hope’ is closely related to particular terms which are in turn close synonyms of each other; good, altruistic, ethical, moral, and neighbourly love, for example. Whilst these terms are not interchangeable in every grammatical context, they will be understood here as related. Neighbourly love for instance, is a state, whilst ‘good’ is an adjective which may be employed to describe actions consistent with neighbourly love. Hope is usually an expectant term; one can be hopeful about the consequences of their actions, in contrast to acting out of neighbourly love, which need not be as concerned with any particular outcome. However, in the context of the present study, hope is predominantly presented as a view in

opposition to nihilism. These terms (hope, good, moral, etc.) are neither inherently separate nor inherently synonymous, but understood as closely related in this context.

A central assumption of this dissertation is that ethics or goodness provides hope. Hope is related to these other terms in this way. Hope can be understood here, as an ephemeral philosophical subject that stands firmly in opposition to nihilism or futility. This will become more apparent as we progress. Conversely, antonymous terms are also considered to be related; nihilism, sin, selfishness, evil, immorality, and unethical, for example. These terms are again, not inherently interchangeable in every grammatical context. Sin usually pertains to actions, whilst immoral is a descriptive term (though original sin, as we will see, also pertains to a description of the human condition). Yet, for present purposes, these terms can be understood as related. Similarly, evil, pain, and suffering are somewhat interchangeable terms with the potential to lead to hopelessness or nihilism (though this could be disputed with reference to the resilience of humanity portrayed eloquently in the book of Job, or in other ways). Understanding the terminology in this manner will aid the forthcoming project by avoiding confusion in this regard.

1.2 Theo-centric Context of Ethics

The primary goal of evolutionary ethics is to provide a framework in which the existant degree of altruism, goodness, ethics, etc. can be understood as consistent with the principles of natural selection. In other words, it seeks to explain how goodness came to be. Despite the profoundness of this question, it is relatively recent in philosophical and moral discourse. This is because traditionally, an answer was already assumed; goodness came from God. The Australian philosopher Peter Singer explains this point, “For centuries, religion provided a way out of this difficulty. It is natural for those who believe in God to look to his

wishes or commands for the origin of morality.”⁷ God created the world and it was good (Gen. 1:10). This theme runs throughout the history of philosophy and ethics even beyond Judeo-Christian civilisations. Plato’s *Demiurge* is a prominent example; although Platonism was indeed appropriated by Christian thinkers, for example Augustine⁸, Plato’s supposition of a good God was explicated in a culture that in his own time was quite distinct from early Judeo-Christian civilisations, “Let us therefore state the reason why the framer of this universe of change framed it at all. He was good... God therefore, wishing that all things should be good and so far as possible nothing be imperfect...”⁹ Given its divine origin, goodness was expected and assumed. It was not a feature of the world that demanded explanation; the explanation was already supposed.

Correspondingly, the rules and laws which determine whether certain actions are classified as moral or immoral were also traditionally associated with a divine will, as philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre illustrates, “God is our father. God commands us to obey him. We ought to obey God because he knows what is best for us.”¹⁰ God established a divine mandate, a code for how we ought to live, rules we must abide by. MacIntyre goes on, however, to suggest that this vision of God-as-lawgiver immediately raises the question of why should we be obedient? He provides an answer which relates to the first point made in this section; that God is assumed good (and holy and powerful) and God’s laws reflect this.¹¹ The concept of a pre-existing normative, divine, natural or ecclesiastical set of laws permeated moral discourse for centuries, and has been defined as ‘classicism’ by theologian Richard McBrien in his work *Catholicism*.¹² The classicist view of ethics, which is arguably still prevalent, can be evidenced throughout history from the ten commandments of the

⁷ Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution and Moral Progress*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) p. xv

⁸ Scott MacDonald, ‘The Divine Nature’, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 72

⁹ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Denis Lee, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979) p. 42

¹⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, (London: Routledge, 2002) p. 107 [Originally published, 1967]

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108

¹² Richard McBrien, *Catholicism: II*, (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980) p. 941

Decalogue through to the deontological categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant, characterised by the idea of universal laws; “I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.”¹³

This classicist vision of ethics remained dominant throughout the centuries – though the rigidity or legalism varied among scholars. The ethical vision of Aquinas, for instance, was more amenable, appreciative not only of scriptural decrees but also of the powers of human reason, evident in his strong admiration of Aristotle.¹⁴ Aquinas also understood the variance in human nature with regard to moral beliefs; “... these moral institutions are various for various people.”¹⁵ Religious thinking dominated the ethical and intellectual landscape until the Enlightenment when many felt that faith was beginning its demise; Matthew Arnold wrote in ‘Dover Beach’ [1867] how he heard the sea of faith’s “long withdrawing roar”.

Secular ethics and even atheism are arguably evident even amongst the pre-Socratics. Nevertheless, it was not really until the Enlightenment that such ideals became more prominent, though perhaps still peripheral. Oxford theologian Alister McGrath, for example, pinpoints the French Revolution in 1789 as the “dawn of the golden age of atheism in the West.”¹⁶ Secular ethical systems emerged from this tumultuous period, manifest for example, in the influential utilitarian philosophies of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Rather than obedience to divine law, Bentham and Mill sought to base morality and law on

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 15 [Originally published 1785]

¹⁴ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2010) pp. 418-424 [Originally published, 1946]

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: I-II*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd and rev. ed., (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1920) 100.1

¹⁶ Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, (London: Random House, 2004) p. 21

the principle of whether certain actions “augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question.”¹⁷

Amongst the secular ethicists, the question of the origins of goodness was still hardly asked – and those that did probe this question, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, still proposed that a set of laws were devised by archaic societies.¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche recognised this in 1886 as he wrote, “As strange as it may sound, the problem of morality itself has been *missing* from every ‘science of morals’ so far: there was no suspicion that anything was really a problem.”¹⁹ The classicist framework for ethics, thus, maintained its influence. In religious systems particularly, the concept of divine laws was paramount. What can be discerned, therefore, is the theo-centric character of the history of ethical philosophy. Intuition and theology usually provided an answer to the origins of good; goodness came from God. This is a foundational premise which framed philosophical and theological understandings of good and evil; ethics is contextualised by a good God, and a good creation. This is a marked characteristic of the traditional understanding of good and evil. The primary question of evolutionary ethics, therefore, did not exist in public consciousness in any meaningful way until relatively recently. The assumption of the innate goodness of God and creation led to the reverse question gaining a far more pronounced role in philosophy and theology; the question was, as articulated by David Hume, “Whence then is evil?”²⁰

¹⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988) p. 2 [Originally published 1780]; also, John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, (London: Dover, 2007) [Originally published 1861]. There are, however, subtle differences between Bentham and Mill. For example, Mill distinguishes between higher and lower forms of happiness. For discussion, see Harvard political philosopher, Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?*, (London: Penguin, 2009) p. 52

¹⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. H.J. Tozer, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1998) p. 15 [Originally published 1762]

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 76 [Originally published 1886]

²⁰ David Hume, *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 100 [Originally published 1779]

1.3 The Theodicy Question

Hume, of course, was not the first to address the infamous ‘problem of evil’ which stems logically from postulating a good, omniscient and omnipotent creator whilst also acknowledging the degree of suffering existent in the world. The ancient Greeks, such as Chrysippus and Epicurus grappled with the issue centuries before Christ. Circa the second century A.D., Sextus Empiricus, classified as a Greek sceptic, elucidated the problem as follows:

Those who affirm positively that God exists cannot avoid falling into an impiety. For if they say that God controls everything, they make Him the author of evil things; if on the other hand, they say that He controls some things only, or that He controls nothing, they are compelled to make God either grudging or impotent, and to do that is quite obviously an impiety.²¹

This paradox has been perennially recycled and used to underpin attempts at logically challenging the existence of God. The influential Swiss theologian Hans Küng identifies the problem of evil as “the rock of atheism” and suggests that it has scarcely changed since the ancient Greeks.²² It continued to provide ammunition against theism for twentieth century atheist philosophers such as Bertrand Russell²³ and J.L. Mackie²⁴, and perhaps in part led Nietzsche to contemptuously discard the whole idea of Christianity as farcical.²⁵ It is a theme which also perennially appears throughout literary history. The literary critic Terry Eagleton analyses the manifestations of problem of evil in literature from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*.²⁶

Gottfried Leibniz, who coined the term ‘theodicy’, meaning a theological explanation for evil, sought along with others to resolve the problem rationally. Leibniz’s

²¹ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 229

²² Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, (Glasgow: William Collins Sons, 1978) p. 429

²³ Bertrand Russell, *Why I’m Not a Christian*, (London: Routledge, 1957) p. 20

²⁴ J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 4

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 56

²⁶ Terry Eagleton, *On Evil*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010)

answer to the problem was the concept that this is ‘the best of all possible worlds’, “Now as there is an infinity of possible universes in the Ideas of God, but one of them can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for the choice of God which determines him to select one rather than another. And this reason... is to be found... in the degree of perfection....”²⁷ Contrary to Leibniz’s reasoned approach, Kant felt that the theodicy question can only be tackled in the context of faith and by “taking notice of the impotence of our reason.”²⁸ Voltaire re-articulated the problem in his ‘Poem on the Lisbon Disaster’ [1755] and in his work *Candide*,²⁹ whilst others such as Hegel attempted to justify God in light of the problem.³⁰ A more contemporary approach is that of philosopher Alvin Plantinga who sought to outline how beliefs about God can be reconciled with suffering; evil can exist in a world created by a good God. At the risk of oversimplifying, he suggests that moral evil is the result of human persons’ free actions, whilst natural evil is the result of the free actions of nonhuman persons, e.g. Satan (moral evil and natural evil will be further discussed in Chapters Three and Four respectively).³¹ Plantinga thus, is not so much offering a justification of evil in light of God’s goodness, but rather demonstrating the logical coherence of God’s goodness in a world where suffering exists. Pertinent in the context of this thesis, the problem of evil also perplexed Charles Darwin, as he wrote in a letter to the American botanist Asa Gray in 1860:

I cannot see, as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God

²⁷ Gottfried Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics, Correspondence with Arnauld, and Monadology*, trans. George Montgomery, (Chicago: Open Court, 1908) pp. 262-263 [*Monadology* originally published 1714]

²⁸ Immanuel Kant, ‘On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy’, *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 34 [Originally published 1791]

²⁹ Voltaire, *Candide: And Other Stories*, trans. Roger Pearson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) [Originally published 1759] pp. 52-54

³⁰ See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, (Ontario: Batoche, 2001) p. 29 [Originally published 1837]

³¹ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974) pp. 30-59

would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidae* with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice.³²

When considering the problem of evil, an immediate caveat surfaces; the innate subjectivity in our classifying certain events/subjects as ‘evil’. Is it not a remarkable illustration of human hubris that we have taken it upon ourselves to classify what is and what is not evil? This was the objection put forth by Spinoza; notions such as disgust, repugnance, rottenness, ugliness, delight, etc., are only considered as such when certain events affect human senses.³³ Whether or not something, an event or entity, is classified as ‘evil’ depends solely on its relation to the human mind. The theologian John Hick, in his work *Evil and the God of Love*, illustrates the point, “... in terms of the usefulness of things to ourselves, there lies a deeply rooted delusion of the human mind that everything in nature obeys a purpose and works towards some end.”³⁴ It can be argued that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are not *a priori* concepts; they are not Platonic ideas but merely human inventions. As such, even the positing of the problem of evil may be misguided.

This objection to the theodicy question can be substantiated by referral to MacIntyre and the idea of ‘functional concepts’. MacIntyre enters this discussion by questioning the relationship between the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’. Taking his cue from the philosopher Arthur Prior [1914-1969], MacIntyre explains how an ‘is’ can determine an ‘ought’, “From the premise ‘He is a sea-captain’, the conclusion may be validly inferred that ‘He ought to do whatever a sea-captain ought to do’.”³⁵ The validity of a statement attributing ‘goodness’ to a subject can only be ascertained if that subject has been given what MacIntyre calls a ‘functional concept’. A watch can be validly described as a good

³² Charles Darwin, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin: II*, Francis Darwin ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p. 12 [Originally published 1887]

³³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. G.H.R. Parkinson, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1989) p. 37 [Originally published 1677]

³⁴ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed., (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1977) p. 19 [Originally published 1966]

³⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (London: Duckworth, 1981) p. 57

watch if the watch is defined in terms of a purpose or function. A watch may be a good watch because it tells the time accurately; but it cannot be considered good independent of the function we have attributed to it. One could equally say, if they sought to use the watch as a paperweight for instance, that it was a good watch because it performs that function well, irrespective of whether it tells time accurately. Ostensibly, the notion of ‘good’ only exists insofar as we define what good is. Similarly, if we take the idea of a super-virus that has the potential to eradicate human civilisation, we would generally consider that to be an example of evil in the world. However, it is only evil because we attribute evil to it. The virus may be exceptionally good in terms of its functionality; it replicates and infects host bodies efficiently and has developed immunity to antibiotics. Consequently, we are left with the perplexity of whether good even exists abstractly or is wholly and intrinsically bound up in our own definitions and prescribed functions. This perplexity was also attended to by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, and provides a significant obstacle to even posing the problem of evil.³⁶

Just as questions can be raised over the existence of an objective good, so too questions can be raised over the existence of an objective evil. Augustine for example, discussed evil as an absence of good; a ‘privation of good’ or *privatio boni*. Augustine “breathed in” and adapted Plotinus’ notion that evil is not a positive force, but the “going wrong of God’s creation” which is fundamentally good.³⁷ Augustine makes a metaphysical claim that evil is “accurately describable as a loss or lack of goodness” rather than something primary; evil has not been created by God.³⁸ Viewing evil as an absence of goodness further exemplifies the asymmetrical characteristic of the ‘traditional’ theological framework for good and evil; goodness here is again, presupposed. What is required is an

³⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Richard McKeon ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, (New York: Random House, 2001) p. 940

³⁷ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 46-49

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55

understanding or explanation of evil – in this case, evil is not understood to have substance itself but is only a manifestation of the absence of something else – good.

Notwithstanding this caveat, it is still possible to contend that evil exists in the world, and therefore, still demands explanation in itself. Hick presents an argument along these lines in his shift away from Augustine and the neo-Platonist conception of evil as *privatio boni*. Hick believes that evil is a positive force; ‘positive’ meaning in this context, being a substantive ‘something in itself’ and not merely consequential. He asserts, “As an element in human experience, evil is positive and powerful. Empirically, it is not merely the absence of something else but a reality with its own distinctive and terrifying quality and power.”³⁹ For Hick, the quality of natural evil (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc.) can be attributed when it “impinges deleteriously upon the realm of the personal, or at least upon the sphere of animal life.”⁴⁰ The degree of suffering and pain caused by natural evils cannot be understated and dismissed merely as a lack of good, even if the causes were not evil in any *a priori* way; an earthquake or volcanic eruption are not evil things themselves. To discount the suffering and pain caused by these events would be deeply fallacious.

With regard to moral or intentional evil, the inadequacies of *privatio boni* become even more prevalent. When we consider the malevolence and intentional evil which is prevalent in human history and even today, it becomes extraordinarily difficult to attribute this evil to merely a lack of goodness. Taking the holocaust as the archetypal example, Hick states, “The evil will as an experienced and experiencing reality is not negative. It can be a terrifyingly positive force in the world. Cruelty is not merely an extreme absence of

³⁹ Ibid., p. 55

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 56. It is interesting that Hick uses the term ‘animal life’ as opposed to just human life. This is a relevant distinction in the context of evolutionary ethics, given that one of the principle implications of evolution for theology has been the empirical understanding of *homo sapiens* as another animal. This realisation could be interpreted to be in stark contrast to Augustine’s explicit distinction between humanity and other animals by virtue of our intellect. Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, trans. Edmund Hill, John E. Rotelle ed., *On Genesis*, (New York: New City Press, 2002) p. 57

kindness, but is something with a demonic power of its own.”⁴¹ In experiential terms (as opposed to metaphysical) the intentional actions of individuals which cause incomprehensible suffering can hardly be understood as a lack of good virtues. Nevertheless, we should be mindful here that it may not be an ‘either/or’ situation, the *privatio boni* reading on one hand and Hick’s acceptance of evil as a positive force on the other. We should, along with the theologian David Tracy, have an awareness of the necessity of “responsible pluralism”; there is a plurality in texts which demands hermeneutical interpretation.⁴² The debate on evil is a case in point, evident in the writing of psychologist Carl Jung. Hick cites Jung as a critic of the *privatio boni* conception of evil.⁴³ Yet Jung also discusses evil or sin as a result of failing to achieve our ambitious moral expectations.⁴⁴ This aspect of Jung could be interpreted as consistent with the *privatio boni* approach, contrary to Hick’s claim. Therefore, it can be asserted that in exploring this debate on evil, we may not arrive at a firm destination; we may need to leave this question open.

Although the nature of evil may not be clearly defined, the point remains that there is clear evidence of an asymmetrical preoccupation with explanations for evil throughout philosophical and theological history. Certainly before Darwin, and indeed afterward, goodness was assumed and ethicists largely concerned themselves with the so called problem of evil. As Nietzsche states, “Morality itself... was thought to be a ‘given’.”⁴⁵ In contributing to the aims of this chapter, then, we can affirm that the context of theological understandings of good and evil are characterised in a significant way by the prevalence of the theodicy question throughout intellectual history, from the ancient Greeks to contemporary philosophers. Highlighting this point will help contextualise evolutionary

⁴¹ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 57

⁴² David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, (London: SCM, 1981) p. 124

⁴³ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 57n

⁴⁴ Carl Jung, from *Psychology of Religion*, Anthony Storr ed., *Selected Writings*, (London: Fontana, 1983) p. 88 [Originally published 1938]

⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 75

ethics by demonstrating the contrast between traditional ethics and evolutionary ethics. The traditional framework for understanding good and evil will now be further explored, placing emphasis on the dominant themes of sin and punishment in the history of Western thought.

1.4 Original Sin: Evil as Sin and Punishment

The influential concepts of sin and punishment are also intrinsic to the traditional theological metaethic. The theology of sin and punishment provides an understanding of our vision of humanity and its relationship with evil. The predominant framework for understanding these issues has a scriptural source in Genesis, but is more specifically, derived from the Augustinian exegesis of Genesis. Any one model for understanding, as philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur would constantly remind us, is indeed just that; one model among others with multiple interpretations.⁴⁶ However, the influence of Augustine's framework for understanding sin and punishment should not be underestimated. It was already stated in section 1.2 that a cardinal premise which pervades ethical thought is that creation was made 'good'. Another dominant theme which contextualises theological ethics is that this paradisiacal creation was spoiled by what palaeontologist and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin calls an "initial transgression" or primordial sin; humanity turned away from God at some ancient point thus introducing sin into the world – the fall.⁴⁷ This idea of an original sin, dramatised through the Adamic myth, has become deeply entrenched in Western Christian thinking and foregrounds the dominant model for understanding good and evil.

Interestingly, however, the Adamic narrative does hold not much significance throughout either of the testaments. Adam is referred to throughout the Old Testament as a somewhat peripheral or incidental character, and the actual story of the fall holds little significance. Ricoeur makes this point by suggesting that the story of Adam should not be

⁴⁶ Dan R. Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*, (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 14

⁴⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. René Hague, (London: Collins, 1971) p. 81

isolated from the other stories in Genesis; Cain and Abel, the tower of Babel, Noah and the Great flood, etc.⁴⁸ Similarly, according to the Gospels, Jesus never explicitly refers to Adam.⁴⁹ Moreover, the doctrine of original sin is not evident in the writings of the Greek Church Fathers. Although Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa all wrote about the fall, they did not do so in such terms as an original sin or guilt which is inherited by humanity.⁵⁰ Paul did, however, as Ricoeur states, raise the Adamic theme from its lethargy.⁵¹ Even so, Paul only used Adam as a figure with which to contrast Christ, “For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (I Cor. 15:22). Therefore, it is only retroactively through Christ that Adam gained individuality in the scripture; it was retroactively then, that Adam became demythologised and understood as the person from which humanity descended physically.⁵² Ricoeur thus challenges the view that the story of Adam is a cornerstone of the Judeo-Christian tradition, “... it is only a flying buttress, articulated upon the ogival crossing of the Jewish penitential spirit.”⁵³

For Ricoeur, the story of Adam has the “greatness of myth”, indicating that it has a more multifaceted and richer meaning than a purely historical account of an event.⁵⁴ Indeed, Augustine himself recognised this and was perturbed by the possibility of Genesis being interpreted and promulgated literally, “Now it is quite disgraceful and disastrous... that they should ever hear Christians spouting... and talking such nonsense that they can scarcely contain their laughter....”⁵⁵ Ricoeur shares Augustine’s angst, though has the benefit of being able to actually look at how the Adamic myth was interpreted from the time of Augustine until relatively recently, “It will never be said enough just what evil has been done to

⁴⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) pp. 237-238

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238

⁵⁰ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) p. 442

⁵¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 238

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 239

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 239

⁵⁵ Augustine, *On The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, John E. Rotelle ed., *On Genesis*, p. 186

Christianity by the literal interpretation, the “historicist” interpretation, of the Adamic myth. This interpretation has plunged Christianity into the profession of an absurd history....”⁵⁶ Ricoeur opts for a hermeneutical vision which lies between the “naive historicism of fundamentalism and the bloodless moralism of rationalism....”⁵⁷

The prevailing understanding of good and evil manifest in Augustine’s reading of Genesis and his doctrine of original sin, is essentially a response to the conundrum of the problem of evil. Hick suggests that the concept of the fall is scaffolded by two pillars; one maintains the goodness of God and creation (as discussed in section 1.2) and one the guilty nature of creatures:

The theodicy that follows from belief in the fall of angels, and its repetition on mankind, is built upon two central pillars of doctrine: first, that God created all things good; and second, that free creatures, by an inexplicably perverse misuse of their God-given freedom, fell from grace, and that from this fall have proceeded all other evils that we know.⁵⁸

The belief in a fall provides a solution to the question of evil’s origin; it comes as a result of an intentional turning away from God’s goodness. In answering the Gnostics’ articulation of the question ‘Whence comes evil?’, Augustine developed the apologetic concept that humanity’s moral negligence was responsible; evil or suffering came as a result of our sin.⁵⁹

The Adamic myth provides an explicit demarcation between the origin of evil, and the origin of creation itself. It thus provides a stark contrast between the inherent goodness of God’s creation and the existence of evil. In the words of Ricoeur, it distinguishes between the ‘radical’ origins of evil, and ‘primordial’ origins of good.⁶⁰ This understanding of creation can be sharply distinguished from the writings of the Gnostics, such as Theophilus

⁵⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “‘Original Sin’: A Study in Meaning”, Don Ihde ed., *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, (London: Athlone, 2000) p. 285

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 285

⁵⁸ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 62

⁵⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “‘Original Sin’: A Study in Meaning”, p. 271

⁶⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 233

of Antioch, who drew upon the Platonic idea that the universe was made out of pre-existing matter – matter which in their view was deficient, thus accounting for evil in the world.⁶¹ They emphasise the distinction between creator and created, and therein lies the difference between good (God) and evil (matter). In the Gnostic tradition, writers such as Origen therefore, view creation and the fall as almost synonymous.⁶²

In contrast, the theologian John Macquarrie in his work, *Principles of Christian Theology*, considers the Gnostic view inadequate; the fact that creation itself is not God “does not seem in itself to constitute sinfulness.”⁶³ The Gnostics’ stress on the otherness of God does not seem sufficient to account for the existence of evil. Moreover, the Gnostic vision of a deficient creation may well mitigate the goodness of God’s creation. It is for this reason that it is ultimately rejected by Augustine, as Hick explains:

Here, then, is a central theme of Augustine’s thought; the whole creation is good; the sun, moon, stars are good... all are good expressing as they do the creative fecundity of perfect goodness and beauty. So Augustine rejects the ancient Platonic, Neo-Platonic, Gnostic, and Manichaeic prejudice against matter....⁶⁴

The interpretation of the Adamic myth offered by Ricoeur, then, is far closer to the more conventional Augustinian understanding (and is arguably, more coherent); the universe was created good, and evil arrived later, as a result of a radical human offence; an original sin. This is another cardinal feature of a traditional conception of good and evil; there is a chronological and conceptual separation between a good creation and the origin of evil. This is again illustrative of the asymmetry in the traditional conceptual framework for understanding good and evil.

⁶¹ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 297

⁶² John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, rev. ed., (London: SCM, 1977) p. 264. Note that here I follow Macquarrie’s classification of Origen as Gnostic, though this classification may be challenged.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 264

⁶⁴ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 45

Ultimately, the traditional reading of good and evil stemming largely from Augustine interprets the biblical narrative as a literary comedy as opposed to a tragedy. It has a positive beginning and end, with a negative middle. The literary critic Northrop Frye describes the standard structure of a comedy as approximately U-shaped, “where a series of misfortunes and misunderstandings brings the action to a threateningly low point, after which some fortunate twist in the plot sends the conclusion up to a happy ending.”⁶⁵ The biblical narrative as interpreted by Augustine, Ricoeur and others, begins on a high plateau; a good created paradise. Yet a series of misfortunes occur – humanity turning their back on God at several points, but most pertinent to the current discussion, Adam’s succumbing to temptation. This leads to a long period of suffering as punishment. The structure of the narrative of course eventually takes an upward turn and reaches its culmination with our salvation by Christ, as Frye explains, “The entire Bible, viewed as a ‘divine comedy,’ is contained within a U-shaped story of this sort, one in which man, as explained, loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation.”⁶⁶ Of course, this is an approximate and overarching description of the biblical narrative, within which there are numerous stories of the triumphs and tragedies of Israel, and indeed further U-shaped narratives such as the Book of Job and Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son.⁶⁷ Understanding the biblical narrative with this U-shaped, comedic structure again illustrates that at the first apex of the narrative, goodness was presumed; the low period of suffering was explained as the result of humanity’s actions.

⁶⁵ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, (New York: Harvest, 1982) p. 169

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 169

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169

1.4.1 Sin and Human Nature

Another feature of the Adamic myth which characterises traditional thinking on good and evil pertains to the nature of humanity itself. In any given tradition, the structure of ethics is bound to reflect important features of human nature, whatever those features are perceived to be in that given tradition. This premise holds true in the traditional Christian view of good and evil. It was already evidenced (section 1.3) that pre-Darwinian ethical frameworks maintained somewhat of a preoccupation with the question ‘whence comes evil?’ The traditional Augustinian view provides a response to this question which relates to how we view human nature; evil came from humanity.⁶⁸ At the risk of oversimplifying, Augustine postulates that evil arrived into the good creation as a result of human sin. This is allegorically portrayed through the Adamic myth; Adam, the story’s central protagonist, represents humanity by way of his being a primordial ancestor of the human race. Ricoeur makes an interesting clarification on this point. He suggests that Adam is portrayed as sharing our condition.⁶⁹ In other words, he denounces what he believes to be a popular interpretation of Adam; that he was in some senses, a special or supernatural human. Ricoeur is highly cautious about even using the term ‘fall’ because for him, this implies that Adam was somehow elevated above the present human condition.⁷⁰ Furthermore, he perceptively notes that the word ‘fall’ is alien to the scriptural text. A vision of a primordial superhuman – which Ricoeur explains is evident in Plato, Plotinus and gnosis – may diminish or distort the weight of the anthropological message; the Adamic myth is strictly anthropological in Ricoeur’s reading.⁷¹

The associations, both between Adam and humanity, and between humanity and evil/sin, are not however, to be understood as a proclamation of the fundamental evilness of

⁶⁸ Augustine, *Against Julian*, trans. Matthew A. Schumacher, (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1957) p. 45

⁶⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 233

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 233

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233

humanity. This interpretation has been, according to Richard McBrien, one of the most common misunderstandings of original sin.⁷² The prevailing Augustinian understanding of humanity is more nuanced than this, particularly as he incorporates an understanding of free will. Within the myth itself, freedom as a concept is only implicit, apparent in the original defection.⁷³ Augustine incorporated the idea from Tertullian, who in turn was influenced in this regard by the Stoics.⁷⁴ Humans, Augustine argued, have the freedom to make autonomous choices. Freedom is an important prerequisite for moral choices; it is necessary that for actions to have moral worth, actions must be freely chosen (being mindful that the concept of ‘freedom’ is open to multiple interpretations – the theme of free will will be also be important for my central argument presented in later chapters).

For Augustine, there are limits to freedom, unlike Pelagius who proposed that humanity is completely free.⁷⁵ Alister McGrath explains a useful analogy which Augustine used to illustrate his thinking on this matter: a set of scales with two balance pins, one representing good, one representing evil. The scales represent human judgement, and are loaded in favour of evil. The scales, or human free will, still works, but a strong bias exists towards evil. Original sin affects all humanity and is inherited from Adam; it has compromised the human mind.⁷⁶ This weighting towards evil is understood by Augustine to be pride; Adam and Eve voluntarily succumbed to pride thus begetting sin.⁷⁷

Discontent with their human nature, they needed more; they sought to be like God. The myth of Adam is then in part a myth of temptation, illustrating humanity’s inclination towards evil.⁷⁸ At this point, the peripheral characters such as the serpent and Eve play some role. Yet as Ricoeur again explains, they are counterpoles, not be taken as “multiplication of

⁷² Richard McBrien, *Catholicism: I*, p. 162

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 234

⁷⁴ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 444

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 444

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 444-445

⁷⁷ William E. Mann, ‘Augustine on Evil and Original Sin’, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, p. 47

⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 252

the centres of the proliferation of evil”; they do not detract from Adam’s centrality.⁷⁹ There is no doubt that Adam is the key figure, the tragic hero. This idea lies at the centre of Augustine’s dominant theodicy, “that free will is the cause of our doing evil and that thy just judgement is the cause of our having to suffer from its consequences.”⁸⁰ As Augustine himself articulates, “This covers the whole range of evil, i.e. sin and its penalty.”⁸¹ This is a focus of the traditional understanding of good and evil, and human nature; humanity is inclined towards sin and responsible for evil. Every instance of pain and suffering can be accounted for by reference to humanity’s dubious moral character.

1.4.2 Suffering as Punishment

Another related characteristic of the predominant Christian framework for understanding good and evil is the notion of punishment. Punishment is a prevalent theme throughout classical literature, an exemplar being Prometheus’ rebellion and subsequent enslavement. It appears regularly throughout the Hebrew scripture, for example in the Egyptian plagues (Exod. 7:4), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 29:23) and elsewhere. The Adamic myth however, portrays an elaborate and dramatic exposition of the law of retribution, which is conspicuous in how Augustine and Christianity came to understand good and evil. It is through retribution that suffering, the symptom of evil, becomes apparent. Indeed, it may be convincingly argued that evil is deprived of any meaning without its symptom; suffering. As discussed in section 1.3, evil, like good, may not have any intrinsic properties at all; a debated topic in moral philosophy.⁸²

Drawing from the punishments of Adam and Eve, Augustine’s theology develops a legalistic character; sin must be forbidden by divine directive – a characteristic of ethical

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234

⁸⁰ Quoted in John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 59

⁸¹ Augustine, *On True Religion*, John H.S. Burleigh trans. and ed., *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953) p. 236

⁸² See Alasdair MacIntyre’s discussion in *A Short History of Ethics*, pp. 240-261

history explored in section 1.2. Interestingly, it has been suggested by theologian Nancey Murphy and scientist George Ellis that Augustine's context of living within an authoritarian ecclesiastical society may have influenced his thought in this regard.⁸³ In any case, a cardinal feature of Augustine's understanding of good and evil is, as Ricoeur writes, that "suffering is the price for the violation of order."⁸⁴ Having established that sin enters the world through Adam, it is logical that a punishment should follow. Ricoeur posits that nothing could be more rational; crime merits chastisement.⁸⁵ Hick's views are concurrent in his reading of Augustine and the prospect of 'moral balance'. Sin is balanced out by punishment; sin is not allowed to "mar the perfection of God's universe, because the balance of the moral order is preserved by the infliction of appropriate punishment."⁸⁶ This issue is the bedrock of Augustine's theodicy, and hence the preeminent understanding of good and evil; suffering is the result of human sin, it is our punishment, "The theodicy-tradition, which has descended from Augustine through Aquinas to the more tradition-governed Catholic theologians of today... teaches that all evil that indwells or afflicts mankind is, in Augustine's phrase, 'either sin or punishment for sin'.⁸⁷ From this, Augustine "constructed the idea of natural guilt inherited from the first man" to explain suffering within the scheme of crime and punishment.⁸⁸

At this point it must be acknowledged that there are legitimate difficulties in the Augustinian understanding of good and evil. Both Hick and Ricoeur make reference to this. Hick asserts that Augustine's preoccupation with sin and punishment is in direct conflict with the Christian impulses underlying the theodicy question (presumably, those of the

⁸³ Nancey Murphy and George Ellis, *On The Moral Nature of the Universe*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) p. 248

⁸⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *A Symbolism of Evil*, p. 30

⁸⁵ Paul Ricoeur, 'Interpretation of the Myth of Punishment', trans. Robert Sweeny, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 354

⁸⁶ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 87

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 173

⁸⁸ Paul Ricoeur, "'Original Sin': A Study in Meaning", p. 281

goodness of God).⁸⁹ Hick sees some promise in Augustine's theodicy, in that it seeks to bring good out of evil by overruling the malicious deeds of the wicked through punishment.⁹⁰ However, the overwhelming emphasis on the sinful nature of all mankind forces Hick to eventually search elsewhere for a solution to the theodicy problem.⁹¹ Anselm of Canterbury also expressed concerns regarding the sin-punishment framework for understanding evil. Anselm understood the need for punishment, yet he was cautious in how this should be expressed; he was clear to distinguish between punishment as a love of justice rather than as an unjust torment.⁹²

Similarly, Ricoeur pre-empts a substantial challenge to this potent vision; why is the suffering-as-punishment inflicted upon humanity as a whole?⁹³ Paul proclaimed that sin entered the world through one man (Rom. 5:12), though why must the sin and punishment necessarily damn all of humanity to a life of suffering? Original sin may also lie opposed to the theme of Job; the suffering of the just man, which for Hans Küng portrays human perseverance and suffering as a way to be with God, as opposed to a punishment for sin.⁹⁴ Moreover, there are further issues with Augustine's theodicy in light of evolutionary theory, which will be explored in section 1.6. Notwithstanding these considerable deficiencies, the expiatory vision most prominently asserted by Augustine has been, in Ricoeur's words, "the most orthodox tradition of Christianity."⁹⁵ As such, it goes some way in providing a backdrop against which an evolutionary understanding of 'good' can be contextualised and contrasted. This powerful philosophy even transcended specifically Christian thinking, which gives further weight to this assertion.

⁸⁹ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 89

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89

⁹² Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatise of Anselm of Canterbury*, (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning, 2000) p. 307. This point is taken from Anselm's discussion on the instrumentality of the devil.

⁹³ Paul Ricoeur, "Original Sin": A Study in Meaning', p. 281

⁹⁴ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, p. 434

⁹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, "Original Sin": A Study in Meaning', p. 281

1.5 The Legacy of Original Sin

A primary theme of the doctrine of original sin as explored above is the imperfect nature of the human species. Augustine's view could be interpreted as insisting that humanity is fundamentally flawed, or at least that we are inclined to do wrong. Although stemming from a specifically religious origin, this concept has resurfaced in various forms throughout philosophies that do not intentionally have religious motives, or in cases, have decisively anti-religious motives. Rousseau is an interesting example, though not quite as definitive as Arthur Schopenhauer or Hegel, three thinkers to be considered here briefly for their thoughts regarding on original sin.

The original sin, Augustine argued, emerged through pride; Adam and Eve had a prideful want for more.⁹⁶ There is a striking similarity between this concept of pride causing original sin, and Rousseau's idea of *amour propre* or exorbitant self-love. Berkeley philosopher Niko Kolodny explains *amour propre* as a concern to be equal or superior to others in basic worth or standing.⁹⁷ A common reading of Rousseau interprets this self-love as the catalyst for humanity to be wicked.⁹⁸ In this regard, however, Rousseau's philosophy is more nuanced. *Amore propre* in itself is not necessarily the cause of humanity's evil; it is only when humanity is placed within the context of civilisation that *amore propre* becomes inflamed and thus, results in wicked actions. It is the circumstances of society which "makes *amore propre* inevitable."⁹⁹ Later, Jean-Paul Sartre offered a comparable reflection on original sin; it arose only in relation to an 'other', (though Sartre was more focused on 'guilt' as opposed to Rousseau's focus on pride or *amore propre*) "Original sin is my

⁹⁶ William E. Mann, 'Augustine on Evil and Original Sin', p. 47

⁹⁷ Niko Kolodny, 'The Explanation of Amour Propre', *Philosophical Review*, 119.2 (2010) p. 170

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 168

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168

upsurge in a world where there are others.”¹⁰⁰ Humanity, for Rousseau (and Sartre), is naturally good – it is our relationships with each other that brings out our evil.

Here a disparity between Rousseau and original sin could be perceived. Indeed, Rousseau himself felt that he was diverging from original sin; he even uses the term in denouncing it, “Let us lay it down as an incontrovertible rule that the first impulses of nature are always right; there is no original sin in the human heart, the how and why of the entrance of every vice can be traced.”¹⁰¹ However, if one makes a genuine comparison between Rousseau’s concept of inordinate self-love and the Adamic myth, parallels can still be drawn. Ricoeur recognises this, as he recalls how the Adamic tradition views humanity as created good, as a part of a good creation (explored in section 1.2). It was later that the prideful desire corrupted Adam, “This is what Rousseau generally understood: man is ‘naturally good’, but we know him under the regime of civilisation – that is to say, of history, only as ‘depraved’.”¹⁰² In both Rousseau and in Genesis, we can see humanity created good, and then being inclined towards evil. There are, as noted, subtle differences between the two views such as Rousseau’s emphasis on natural goodness over the Augustinian emphasis on natural sinfulness. Yet Bertrand Russell is perhaps audacious as he presents Rousseau’s philosophy as the “antithesis of the doctrine of original sin...”¹⁰³ Hermeneutically, Russell’s reading of Rousseau may be well-founded, particularly given Rousseau’s own views cited above. It may also stem from inherent inconsistencies in Rousseau’s own work, which have been noted by commentators.¹⁰⁴ Russell’s statement does seem overconfident however, in light of the fact both Rousseau’s *amour propre* and original sin concur that humanity, at least in its present condition, is inclined toward wicked actions

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes, (New York: Washington Square, 1984) p. 410 [Originally published 1943]

¹⁰¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley, (London: Dent, 1974) p. 56 [Originally published 1762]

¹⁰² Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 252

¹⁰³ Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, p. 626

¹⁰⁴ For example, Denis Lawton and Peter Gordon, *The History of Western Educational Ideas*, (London: Woburn, 2002) p. 94

as a result of our hubris. Thus, Rousseau's philosophy and view of sin still fits within the asymmetrical framework of primordial goodness, with evil as the phenomenon in need of explanation.

A less controversial instance of original sin's legacy can be found in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, who has been described as a pessimistic philosopher.¹⁰⁵ Unlike Rousseau, he is explicit in acknowledging his Augustinian influence, and writes admiringly on original sin. For present purposes, it is worth noting that Schopenhauer agrees with the general sentiment of this chapter thus far; that original sin holds a privileged place within Christianity, and hence, within a Christian understanding of good and evil, "Certainly, the doctrine of original sin (assertion of the will) and of salvation (denial of the will) is the great truth which constitutes the essence of Christianity..."¹⁰⁶ Drawing heavily from Augustine and the reformer Martin Luther, Schopenhauer argues that the human will has a natural and inescapable inclination towards evil.¹⁰⁷ He even goes as far as to decry Pelagius' vision of humanity as freely morally balanced as "vulgar".¹⁰⁸ Likewise, Nietzsche, though highly critical of the dogma of original sin, maintains that morality itself is a tyranny against our nature and reason.¹⁰⁹ This could be interpreted as viewing humanity as having a decisively anti-moral predisposition, congruent with Augustine's vision of a natural inclination toward evil. The theme of a natural inclination toward evil is thus substantially evident even beyond Christian theology.

Another Augustinian theme explored above which has influenced philosophy is the notion of punishment, explored in section 1.4.2. Hegel, for example, engages in a complex and nuanced analysis of the notion of punishment, and whether or not punishment should be

¹⁰⁵ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 681

¹⁰⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp, seventh ed., (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. 1903) p. 518 [Originally published 1818]

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 518-521

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 519

¹⁰⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 77. For a critical analysis of Nietzsche's rejection of original sin, see Irish theologian Martin Henry, 'Original Sin: A Flawed Inheritance', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 65.1 (2000) pp. 3-12

used as a deterrent. Hegel expresses scepticism towards punishment strictly for retribution sake, though he does believe in punishment.¹¹⁰ Hegel expresses concern about the motives for punishment, and particularly Feuerbach's view that punishment must follow crime if the criminal knew about the punishment.¹¹¹ He expresses anxiety for if such a stringent causal approach to crime and punishment is adopted, then this may lead to indignation. He worries that this negates human freedom and dehumanises individuals.¹¹² However, his philosophy of morality could be understood as being characterised in some respects by a 'crime and punishment' model from this qualifying remark, "The immediacy which is superseded in crime thus leads, through punishment... to affirmation, i.e. to morality."¹¹³ Despite his cautious approach, therefore, punishment is still a striking theme in Hegel's philosophy.

Richard McBrien asserts that whilst original sin has indeed been an influential doctrine, it has often been presented with pessimistic connotations. He feels that such pessimism is a profound misreading of the doctrine and cites Sartre's pessimistic existentialism as an example of such misunderstanding; that we are radically and thoroughly flawed and are helpless in this sinful condition.¹¹⁴ Schopenhauer can also be cited as an archetypal example of deriving pessimism from original sin, because as noted above he is explicit in his admiration of the idea. Schopenhauer views humanity as condemned to sinfulness; our works can never save us.¹¹⁵ Like Sisyphus, condemned for all eternity by Zeus to push a boulder up a hill in what Albert Camus described as a "futile and hopeless labour", we are destined to be imperfect no matter how hard we try.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Peter Steinberger, 'Hegel on Crime and Punishment', *The American Political Science Review*, 77.4 (1983) p. 869

¹¹¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, Allen W. Wood ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 125 [Originally published 1821]

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 132

¹¹⁴ Richard McBrien, *Catholicism: I*, p. 163

¹¹⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, p. 519

¹¹⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955) p. 96 [Originally published 1942]

McBrien reiterates the point that original sin has little biblical basis, particularly in the Old Testament, and has been unfortunately misunderstood throughout history. Consequently, he downplays the idea of original sin and suggests that it no longer plays a major role in modern Catholic theology, and has even less of a role in Protestant theology.¹¹⁷ However, notwithstanding McBrien's remarks on the curtailing of original sin in theology, several modern theologians have persisted in one form or another with the doctrine of original sin, albeit with the Augustinian emphasis on sinfulness understated. Within modern theology, salient examples of the legacy of the doctrine of original sin can still be evidenced. Although certain theologians have moved away from the idea (this will be made evident in Chapter Three, particularly in light of evolutionary theory), we can still see examples of some of its themes.

A recent discussion on modern attempts at persisting with original sin is provided by anthropologist Jonathan Chappell. In reviewing recent literature, such as theologian Raymund Schwager's *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolution*, Chappell notes how certain scholars are keen to uphold the historicity of the fall because of its perceived importance in Catholicism.¹¹⁸ However, such attempts seem to be merely searching for scientific consistencies in embryology and other sciences to corroborate the notion of hereditary transmission of sin.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, these approaches do not take into account the fact that Augustine's model of original sin preceded our understanding of genetic inheritance by over a millennium, before Gregor Mendel began to study nature's methods of genetic transmission in the nineteenth century. Nor do they enter into the 'nature vs. nurture' debate; how much of our behavioural characteristics are biologically inherited and how powerful of a role does culture have?

¹¹⁷ Richard McBrien, *Catholicism: Vol 1*, p. 162

¹¹⁸ Jonathan Chappell, 'Raymund Schwager: Integrating the Fall and Original Sin with Evolutionary Theory', *Theology and Science*, 10.2 (2012) pp. 179-198

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185

As such, any consistencies between scientific understandings of trait transmission and Augustine's work are incidental. As Karl Barth wrote, "we miss the unprecedented and incomparable thing which the Genesis passages tell us of the coming into being and existence of Adam if we try to read and understand it as history, relating it either favourably or unfavourably to scientific palaeontology...."¹²⁰ Somewhat more viable positions on original sin are also defended by contemporary thinkers such as John Polkinghorne, who suggests that the primordial 'turning away' from God is symbolic of the dawning of human consciousness.¹²¹ Similarly, R.J. Berry suggests that Adam could be taken not as a historical individual, but as the first 'spiritual' human.¹²² Therefore, we can assert that the doctrine still has advocates today, albeit shaped differently to accommodate modern understandings of science.

Further instances of the lingering influence of Augustine's account of original sin are according to British scholar Oliver Bennett, evident in the writings of John Paul II. Quoting from John Paul II's *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Bennett suggests that the late Pope is "unwilling to let go of the concept of divine justice that reserves the hope of eschatological reward... whilst meting out punishment to those seen to deserve it."¹²³ Whilst John Paul II did indeed make statements to justify Bennett's assessment, it could be argued that it is an unfair classification. John Paul II does give due importance to the theological theme of justice, though he also gives forgiveness primacy and repeats that the two cannot be untwined – this may be seen to echo Anselm's distinction between punishment as a love

¹²⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: IV.1* trans. G.W. Bromley, G.W. Bromley and T.F. Torrance eds., (Edinburgh:T&T Clarke, 1994) p. 508 [Originally published 1953]

¹²¹ Quoted in John Bimson, 'Doctrines of the Fall and Sin After Darwin', Michael Northcott and R.J. Berry eds., *Theology After Darwin*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009) p. 116

¹²² R.J. Berry, 'Review of Norman C. Nevin ed., Should Christians Embrace Evolution? Biblical and Scientific Responses', *Science and Christian Belief*, 22.2 (2010) p. 208

¹²³ Oliver Bennett, 'The Manufacture of Hope: Religion, Eschatology and the Culture of Optimism', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 17.2 (2011) p. 123

of justice and punishment as torment discussed in section 1.4.2.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the theme of justice is still evident in John Paul II, even if Bennett might be too strong in his realisation of this. Understanding the context of good and evil through this expiatory or crime-punishment model, however, presents significant theological problems, despite its prevalence throughout history. Understanding the context of morality in terms of punishment could negate moral actions, if those actions are only being carried out because of the fear of punishment. This is the perspective of morality offered by Kant, who views the motives of actions as the criteria of demarcation between moral and immoral, “What counts is not actions, which one sees, but those inner principles of actions which one does not see.”¹²⁵ This is the great flaw in Pascal’s wager, which states that one should believe in God if only because the consequences of disbelief are so great in comparison with the relatively little effort one must exert by believing.¹²⁶ Do these disingenuous motives not diminish the perceived ‘goodness’ of the actions? Kant would argue yes, that actions do not have moral worth if they are precipitated by disingenuous motives, though others of course may not agree. Hick makes similar remarks, as he suggests that good actions that arise out of free and responsible decisions are more valuable than good deeds done merely out of necessity.¹²⁷

There arises then an interesting contrast between moral actions out of self-interest and moral actions out of a genuine desire to be good. Such a distinction is explored at length in Swedish theologian Anders Nygren’s significant work *Agape and Eros* published in the 1930s. Nygren uses the Greek distinctions between two kinds of love (*Agape* and *Eros*) to demonstrate how one (*eros*) describes loving actions emerging from ultimately self-

¹²⁴ John Paul II, ‘No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness’, (Rome: 2001) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20011211_xxxv-world-day-for-peace_en.html accessed 15th Aug. 2012

¹²⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 19-20

¹²⁶ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, (London: Penguin, 1979) pp. 149-155 [Originally published 1669]

¹²⁷ John Hick, *The Philosophy of Religion*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1983) p. 45

gratifying motives, whilst the other (*agape*) is a genuine, selfless love.¹²⁸ Nygren identifies *agape* as the only true source of Christian love, and thus, in a somewhat Kantian manner, the source of true morality. Pertaining to the topic under discussion at present, acting out of fear of punishment could be equated to Nygren's understanding of *eros*.¹²⁹ The Kantian outlook of sharply distinguishing motives from actions is an intriguing and oft debated issue, which is a significant aspect of the context of understanding good and evil. Furthermore, this point becomes even more conspicuous in the field of evolutionary ethics, which will be engaged with in more detail in the next chapter. Therefore, it is an interesting aspect of the traditional theological understandings of good and evil.

Although the influence of original sin still lingers in some areas, what is common in more modern theology is to shift the emphasis away from the 'sinful' nature of humankind, and toward the salvific event of Christ. The emphasis on Christ's saving actions rather than the sinfulness of Adam characterises and differentiates the major theologians of the twentieth century, such as Karl Barth, Karl Rahner and Jürgen Moltman. Rahner explains the premise as follows, "It may be assumed that sin was only permitted by God within the domain of his unconditional and stronger salvific will, from which beginning was directed towards God's self-communication in Christ."¹³⁰ Ricoeur also emerges as a proponent of this school of thought with his statement, "We never have the right to speculate on either the evil that we inaugurate, or on the evil that we find, without reference to the history of salvation."¹³¹ Such a shift in emphasis will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three, though ultimately, I will argue for a more immanent and present conception of hope

¹²⁸ Philip Watson, 'Translator's Preface', Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip Watson, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953) p. vii [Originally published 1932]

¹²⁹ Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, suggests that such debate has drawn too sharp a distinction between the two forms of love and much confusion has been caused as a result of translations. He argues that these kinds of love cannot be separated and are all elements of Christian love. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, (Rome: 2005) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html 19th Sept. 2013

¹³⁰ Quoted by Richard McBrien, *Catholicism: I*, p. 165

¹³¹ Paul Ricoeur, "'Original Sin': A Study in Meaning", p. 286

than theological views which emphasise an ultimate salvation. Also, it is noticeable that a refocused emphasis on salvation still adheres to the U-profiled comedic structure of the Augustinian reading of the biblical narrative mentioned in section 1.4; a presupposed goodness tainted by humanity's turning away, even if to be eventually restored.

1.6 Problems with Original Sin as a Theodicy in Light of Darwin

Heretofore, this chapter has explored the context of the predominant model for understanding good and evil, as expressed largely through the Augustinian theodicy tradition. Particular features of this influential outlook were presented in order to provide a backdrop for this thesis with its focus on evolutionary ethics. Whilst carefully acknowledging that the framework for understanding good and evil presented in the writings of Augustine and more modern commentators (Hick, Ricoeur, etc.) is just one model among many, it was evidenced just how pervasive this understanding is by mentioning many important philosophers and theologians who have adopted various aspects of it. In light of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, however, this model for understanding good and evil becomes highly problematic. Reasons for this will now be briefly discussed, which indicate the need for a deeper engagement with relevant aspects of current evolutionary theory. The issues outlined below essentially demonstrate why a new perspective on understanding good and evil is required in light of evolution. Attempts at which will be elaborated on in more detail in later chapters.

1.6.1 Issues with the Asymmetry of A Primordial Good and Conspicuous Evil

Perhaps the most salient issue that evolutionary theory presents to the traditional understanding of good and evil is the abolition of the notion of a primordial good, thus posing a strong challenge to the dominant asymmetrical view of a presupposed good and a

requirement to explain evil. Evolutionary theory forced us to fundamentally alter our view of time-scales and the proportion of biological history that humans have inhabited; we were not specially created amongst other creatures but only arrived on the evolutionary scene in comparatively immediate history. The American philosopher Daniel C. Dennett often quotes, in writing and lectures, Robert Beverly MacKenzie, an early critic of Darwin:

In the theory with which we have to deal, Absolute Ignorance is the artificer; so that we may enunciate as the fundamental principle of the whole system, that, *in order to make a perfect and beautiful machine, it is not requisite to know how to make it*. This proposition will be found, on careful examination, to express, in condensed form, the essential purport of the Theory, and express in a few words all Mr. Darwin's meaning; who by a strange inversion of reasoning, seems to think Absolute Ignorance fully qualified to take the place of Absolute Wisdom in all the achievements of creative skill.¹³²

Dennett draws attention to Darwin's "strange inversion of reasoning"; the fact that apparent design need not in an evolutionary view, be designed. Darwin's theory of evolution, then, could be argued to represent a decisive shift in how we view the world, as opposed to being a purely scientific theory. Viewing biological life, and indeed the world, as an evolving process is a significant shift in attitude from either the traditional image of a static creation, or the resignation to ignorance. A prolonged and transformational process is a substantially different worldview, one which is deeply enigmatic but also simultaneously logical – the strong survive and propagate. Evolution changes our simplistic appreciation of causality by allowing randomness to precede order; it becomes more dynamic than the assumption that design necessarily implies a designer. As such, evolution possesses substantial philosophical and theological import – such themes will be explored in greater depth in later chapters.

¹³² Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, (London: Penguin, 1995) p. 65

Dennett, among many others, has therefore enthusiastically defended the philosophical significance of evolutionary theory.¹³³

There are however, those who insist that scientific theories such as evolution should be confined to science and not be incorporated into other areas such as theology and religion. Perhaps the most renowned proponent of such a view was Stephen Jay Gould, who developed the methodological approach known as ‘NOMA’ or non-overlapping magisteria. Gould was particularly concerned with the fields of science and religion, and suggested the delineation of certain topics into each of these fields.¹³⁴ However, as I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, evolutionary theory does in fact have profound implications for the fields of theology, religion, philosophy, and particularly ethics, a subset of these fields. Moreover, Gould’s advocacy of his NOMA approach is in itself wrought with inconsistencies. For example, he acknowledges that evolution presents an authoritative challenge to the prospect of a soul infused in humans indicating our superiority over other animals. Yet he maintains in vain that evolution does not infringe on this religious belief.¹³⁵ Gould’s thesis may hold true in certain instances; for example, the atomic weight of nitrogen may bear no impact on theological ideas, but presenting it as a universal approach is deeply inadequate. A far more robust position is defended by MacIntyre, who realises that traditional academic disciplinary boundaries which compartmentalise thought, distorts and obscures key principles of those disciplines.¹³⁶

With regard to envisioning original sin in light of evolutionary theory, Nancey Murphy and George Ellis, in their study *On the Moral Nature of the Universe*, demonstrate difficulties that evolutionary theory presents for the traditional Augustinian theodicy with its presuppositions of primordial goodness. They correctly note that because humans are

¹³³ Ibid., p. 21

¹³⁴ Stephen Jay Gould, ‘Nonoverlapping Magisteria’, *Leonardo’s Mountain of Claims and the Diet of Worms: Essays on Natural History*, (New York: Random House, 1998) pp. 269-284

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 284

¹³⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 264

essentially an infantile species within the grand scheme of evolution, tens of millions of years of animal suffering preceded our existence; there is no sign of a primordial goodness. However, theologians such as Christopher Southgate are cautious in this regard. He worries about over-sentimentalising animal experience in what he terms “bambi theology.”¹³⁷ Although he does not wish to minimise the extent of animal suffering, he acknowledges the essential role of animal suffering in evolution; for example, the suffering of a deer at the hands of predators or disease may ultimately benefit the group of deer given that they will not grow too numerous for their resources and perhaps all starve.¹³⁸ The evolved pseudo-immunity to certain diseases also emerges from the suffering of many from the disease. However, what is at issue here pertains more to the fact that human suffering is essentially animal suffering; we are animals. Although as Southgate rightly points out, positives often emerge from suffering, such suffering still precedes us, and thus the image of a primordial good seems inappropriate.

Consequently, Augustine’s postulation that human sin is the direct cause of suffering and evil in the world is incoherent with our current knowledge of life’s origins.¹³⁹ The theologian Holmes Rolston III offers a concurrent perspective, “Suffering in a harsh world did not enter chronologically after sin and on account of it. There was a struggle for long epochs before the human arrival...”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, as it will be argued in later chapters, goodness is extremely recent in evolutionary history and thus, the traditional notion of primordial goodness seems untenable. For this reason and others, Murphy and Ellis become highly critical of the Augustinian model of original sin. They acknowledge how the

¹³⁷ Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil*, (London: Westminster John Knox, 2008) p. 6

¹³⁸ Of course, this is an oversimplified example which serves only to illustrate; evolutionary developments are more multifaceted and interloped with other developments, for example, as deer evolve to be better at avoiding predators or neutralising diseases, so too do predators and diseases evolve to become better at catching them or fighting their immune systems. Biologist Richard Dawkins has described such interloped evolutionary lineages as evolutionary ‘arms races’, Richard Dawkins and John R. Krebs, ‘Arms Races between and within Species’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, 205.1161 (1979) p. 489

¹³⁹ Nancy Murphy and George Ellis, *On The Moral Nature of the Universe*, p. 245

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 245

Augustinian sequential view of a paradise lost by human transgression becomes deeply problematic in light of our understanding of the history of life, and thus support Hick's repudiation of it.¹⁴¹

Although Murphy and Ellis are correct in highlighting the disparity between Augustine's original sin and the knowledge of our origins acquired from the study of evolution, it could be argued that they are too strident in their denunciation of his work. It is no intellectual victory to outthink a scholar who is separated from the knowledge one has by a millennium and a half. Augustine should not be too harshly criticised for his mistakes with regard to his ignorance of the pre-human world because he simply did not have the same information available to him that we do (though there are of course other reasons for rejecting his view, as Hick explores).¹⁴² Augustine himself should be commended for at least recognising the allegorical nature of the creation narrative as expressed in Genesis, as he equates the figurative days to ages of creation.¹⁴³ Even though Augustine was eventually subject to empirical refutation, he went some way in contributing to our understanding of human nature through his hermeneutical appreciation of Genesis. Yet, it still must be firmly asserted that evolutionary theory significantly erodes Augustine's theodicy because of his presuppositions of a primordial goodness gone awry, and his explanation of evil in terms of human sin.

1.6.2 The Measure of Suffering

A similar difficulty which evolution poses to the traditional understanding of good and evil pertains to the measure of suffering apparent in the natural world and its centrality in the creative process of natural selection. The creative process of evolution is incomprehensibly violent and competitive, exemplified in Darwin's *Ichneumonidae* and understood as "red in

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 244

¹⁴² John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 89

¹⁴³ Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, p. 62

tooth and claw” – such principles are presuppositions of evolutionary ethics to be explored in the next chapter.¹⁴⁴ Traditional theodicies, such as the pervasive Augustinian model, were not formulated with the understanding of just how vast the timescales of evolution are, and thus, how extensive the apparent suffering and wastage of the process is. This realisation, as Alister McGrath asserts, goes far beyond the concerns of traditional theodicy.¹⁴⁵ He articulates that our understanding of Darwinian evolution greatly exacerbates the original problem of evil.¹⁴⁶ The measure of suffering that has become apparent through our knowledge of evolution may thus be taken as another significant challenge to the traditional theo-centric framework for understanding good and evil; the asymmetry of a presupposed goodness seems to be at odds with the essential role of death, struggle and competition in evolutionary history.

At this point, one could raise an objection that echoes Spinoza’s mentioned in section 1.3. Whilst we can appreciate that there is a great deal of suffering, one could ask, suffering for whom? It could be that the interpretation of natural selection as a process teeming with suffering is only understood as such through a particular hermeneutical lens. The emotive language we use in discussions on the matter – pain, suffering, red in tooth and claw, etc. – may be skewing perceptions. Gould makes this point as he suggests that understanding the natural world as exceptionally vicious and in need of metaphysical and theological defence may be just one hermeneutical understanding; a hermeneutic which has emerged from a context steeped in violence itself, “measured in terms of battles won and enemies destroyed.”¹⁴⁷ A similar critique can be found with Rolston, as he offers an alternative to the more common ‘red in tooth and claw’ perspective on evolution. He

¹⁴⁴ Phrase taken from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s ‘In Memoriam A.H.H.’.

¹⁴⁵ Alister McGrath, *Darwinism and The Divine*, (West-Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) p. 202

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.202

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, (London: Penguin, 1977) p. 88

suggests that the evolutionary struggle is best characterised as a sacrificial tragedy, exemplified in Christ's passion, though a tragedy from which beauty emerges:

The secret of life is seen now to lie not so much in heredity molecules, or in natural selection and the survival of the fittest, or in life's informational, cybernetic learning. The secret of life is that it is a passion play. This is the labor of divinity, and it is misperceived if seen only as selfish genes or red in tooth and claw. The view here is not panglossian; it is a tragic view of life, but one in which tragedy is the shadow of prolific creativity. That is the case, and the biological sciences with their evolutionary history can be brought to support this view, although neither tragedy nor creativity is part of their ordinary vocabulary.¹⁴⁸

In order for life to flourish, death must occur; this is a central principle of natural selection. Yet even if this alternative interpretation is adopted, it still presents a challenge to the Augustinian theodicy as it negates the need for suffering to be explained. If suffering is merely a hermeneutical understanding indicative of a cultural context, then this negates the need for a theodicy; Augustine's doctrine of original sin becomes redundant. In either case then, whether evolution is a raging battle royal or a creative tragedy, it erodes the dominant understanding of good and evil with its asymmetrical focus on an established good repealed because of human sin.

1.6.3 Anthropocentrism

The predominant conception of good and evil can also be characterised by its focus on humanity. In Augustine's view, through our initial sin, humanity is essentially the culprit behind suffering in the world; the paradisiacal creation went awry because of our actions. Other appreciations of good and evil also share this idiosyncrasy; the free will defence advocated by Alvin Plantinga, for instance, cites creatures' freedom to act good or evil as an explanation for evil. Plantinga even stresses that this free will defence can be extended to

¹⁴⁸ Holmes Rolston III, 'Caring for Nature: From Fact to Value, From Respect to Reverence', *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, 39.2 (2004) pp. 292-293

incorporate natural evil, given the free will of Satan or demons – as discussed in section 1.3.¹⁴⁹ The ‘best of all possible worlds’ theodicy of Leibniz is less explicitly vulnerable to this criticism, as is the more nuanced version of it promoted by Aquinas.¹⁵⁰ However, when dealing with the question of whether this is or is not the best of all possible worlds, one could contentiously raise the question, ‘best for whom?’ The grand narrative of evolution continually indicates that human beings are seemingly insignificant late-comers in the unfolding drama; we are an ephemeral thread sown into a boundless tapestry. Therefore, it becomes dubious to propose that this is the best of all possible worlds, if we are understanding it in terms of what is best for us; ‘best’ is again characterised in purely human terms.

In this view, the entire problem of evil could be rendered unintelligible; pain and suffering and their requirement to be explained are only understood in humanity’s seemingly insignificant sphere. Christopher Southgate writes on this matter, though he disagrees with the premise.¹⁵¹ He argues that there is a genuine need for a theodicy, and moreover, that previous understandings of good and evil, such as those explored in this chapter, have been too anthropocentric to be reconciled with evolutionary theory.¹⁵² He acknowledges that traditional theodicies are too anthropocentric, but he does not suggest that this important point makes the problem of evil obsolete. It could conversely be maintained, that some degree of anthropocentrism is warranted based on the fact that humans do exhibit certain characteristics which distinguish us from the rest of the animal kingdom. Such sentiment is apparent in theologians such as Rahner, who writes that it is “through men above all that we must look at in order to learn what the Creator-creature relationship is.”¹⁵³ Our social and

¹⁴⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 58

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: I*, 19.3

¹⁵¹ Christopher Southgate, ‘God and Evolutionary Evil: Theodicy in Light of Darwin’, *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, 37.4 (2002) p. 809

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 821

¹⁵³ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations: I*, trans. Cornelius Ernst, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1965) p. 164 [Originally published 1954]

cultural behaviour is far more intricate and advanced than any other living organism, a fact that even stalwart evolutionists like Richard Dawkins will acknowledge.¹⁵⁴ Thus there emerges a necessary dialectic on this issue which could not be resolved here, but will be a perennial question posed by theology and science alike; are humans special? What can be firmly asserted, however, is that evolution brings with it new perspectives on the problem of evil.

1.7 Conclusion

To conclude, five distinct points pertaining to the traditional theological understanding of good and evil can be discerned. Firstly, as articulated in section 1.2, our conceptions of ethics have generally had a theo-centric character; goodness was always attributed to God. Divine laws stipulated what was considered right and wrong. Even pre-evolutionary secular ethics can be seen to be consistent with some form of overarching laws. Moreover, the theo-centric appreciation of the origin of goodness was hardly challenged at all; the question of evolutionary ethics, where does goodness come from, was not asked. Secondly, it was explained in section 1.3 how the converse question became one of the most dominant perplexities in theological history; whence comes evil? Rather than searching to ascertain where goodness comes from, theology and philosophy had a general preoccupation with the origins of evil. Consequently, we see an overarching theological conception which maintained an asymmetry; a primordial goodness and a conspicuous evil. This vision led to a myriad of arguments pertaining to evil, from attempts to justify God (in the case of Leibniz, Hegel and others), to attempts to refute God's existence (in the case of Bertrand Russell and J.L Mackie). More significantly in this context, it gave rise to the most dominant

¹⁵⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 30th Anniversary ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 189 [Originally published 1976]

model that has been used to understand good and evil; the Augustinian framework of original sin and the fall.

The third and fourth discernable points were two elements of theological understandings of good and evil, explicated in section 1.4; the notions of a fallen human state or natural inclination towards evil and sin, and the focus on punishment. The belief that humanity is fundamentally flawed or destined to sin could be considered a pessimistic outlook. It may, as was asserted above, have arisen in part from the cultural context of Augustine which promoted obsequiousness to authoritarian ruling regimes, and was certainly influenced by his exegesis of Genesis. However, it was also discussed how attempts have been made in twentieth century theology particularly, to bring the theme of Christian salvation to the forefront and mitigate the more pessimistic motifs of original sin – yet, this still adheres to the U-profile of the biblical narrative and the asymmetry of a pre-existent goodness to be restored. The vision of suffering as a punishment for humanity's sinful nature could also be understood as pessimistic, as it leads one to understand moral actions as a result of fear rather than genuine motives. This point was discussed with relation to Kant's ideas on motives and Nygren's classifications of *agape* and *eros*. Loving actions done out of fear of punishment may be equated to *eros*; they are actions stemming from self-interest, as opposed to genuine Christian love or *agape*. This distinction will become a significant theme in the next chapter which will engage with both Christian ethics and evolutionary ethics itself. The influence of these themes in philosophy and theology was then explored in section 1.5, to demonstrate how instrumental the traditional or Augustinian vision as understood here has been.

The fifth discernable point which concluded this chapter and established the background for this thesis was the inconsistencies between the traditional understandings of good and evil and evolutionary theory. Whilst there have been significant efforts made to

persist with some or all of the themes of original sin, it has been widely acknowledged (by theologians such as Alister McGrath, Christopher Southgate, Holmes Rolston and others) that evolutionary theory does indeed bring new dimensions to bear with regard to how we are to understand suffering in the natural world. Particularly important in this context is how evolutionary theory presents perhaps insurmountable difficulties for the vision of a paradise lost, which scaffolds the traditional understanding of good and evil. As such, it is necessary that theology engages more fully with a framework for understanding good and evil in terms of evolution. Consequently, this thesis will engage with such a framework and present a particular reading of evolutionary ethics which does not necessarily supersede previous thinking on Christian ethics, but provides a new dimension which is accommodative of current theory in science and theology. In achieving this task, the next chapter will examine the compatibility of Christian ethics and evolutionary ethics as I understand them, in contributing to a synthesis between theological and evolutionary approaches to provide an overarching ethical framework, one which I will ultimately argue is hopeful and optimistic.