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Evil and Moral Responsibility in *The Vocation of Man*

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The Horrific World

In the third part of the *Vocation of Man,* Fichte argues that the world as we experience it is so awful that we cannot rationally accept that it is all there is—it simply cannot be the case that life exists just so that it can die (*VM,* 81). He provides a lengthy list of the harms that surround us in this world, beginning with those inflicted by nature, such as (paraphrasing slightly): bad weather, floods, storms, volcanoes, diseases that cause the deaths of children and mature adults, plagues, loneliness, loss of parents or family, hurricanes, and earthquakes (*VM,* 82), and finally the recalcitrance of inert and hostile primeval forests, deserts, and swamps (*VM,* 83). The harms that he lists are framed as those that serve to damage or limit the possibilities of human beings; he is not concerned here with harms inflicted upon or suffered by nonhuman creatures. The harm done by nature is not the fault of the victim—the "industrious and prudent man is abandoned to hunger and misery through no fault of his own" (*VM,* 82). These harms squander the potential of rational agents—it seems to him a waste that "immortal spirits must still direct all their thought and ingenuity and all their effort to the soil that bears their nourishment" (*VM,* 82).

There is hope for all these poor souls, of course. Fichte is optimistic that science and technology, properly harnessed, will ultimately weaken the power of these evils such that the natural world will present a friendlier face to us: cultivated, it will promote our ends, rather than thwarting them (*VM,* 83). Nature, thinks Fichte, is not ultimately destined to remain a problem for us.

What he is more concerned about are the evils caused by our own free agency: "[M]an's most cruel enemy is man" (*VM,* 83). Examples are cannibalism and war (*VM,* 83),[1] oppression of the masses by the elite, and the petty infighting even among those who fight for "the good," who pursue their own particular conception of the good and accuse those who disagree of betrayal (*VM,* 84–85). The work of science, which ought to go to improving the lot of humankind, instead goes to supplying navies with weaponry to seek out men to destroy (*VM,* 84).

Fichte is convinced that this situation cannot last forever, "unless the whole of human existence is a purposeless and meaningless game" (*VM,* 85). Human societies can and will progress in their cultural development, and ultimately will all come together into one true state, in which "all temptation to evil, indeed the very possibility of anyone's rationally deciding upon evil behavior, will be fully eliminated, and man will be given all possible encouragement to direct his will to the good" (*VM,* 89). The improvement of the human species, of course, is intended to eradicate evil, and faith in the belief that this is possible is what drives Fichte's conclusions in third part of the *Vocation of Man*.

The Problem of Evil

In these few pages, then, Fichte has rehearsed a number of the classic examples of evil. While he only uses the actual word *evil* (*Böse*) in reference to those harms inflicted by free agents, the two sets of examples he gives nonetheless echo the division is traditionally found within the philosophical problem of evil, between physical evil (harm caused within the natural world such as natural disasters, disease, and the like), and moral evil (harm caused by human agency). This distinction allows for various responses to the problem of evil, which is not focused on evil itself, but on whether the existence of evil in the world is compatible with the existence of a God that is both good and omnipotent.

Those who defend the existence of God argue that moral evil can be explained away in terms of the "free will defense,"[2] which states that a world that includes beings with free will is better than a world without such beings, and it is not God's fault what those free beings choose to do. Meanwhile, physical evil can be explained in terms of God's overall plan – that some agents must undergo deprivation for the good of others, but that this is ultimately for the good of the whole.[3] Apparent physical evil can also be explained as just punishment for sin, or as teaching a valuable lesson to sinners in order to forestall future evil.[4] Therefore, both moral evil and physical evil can be seen to be unavoidable consequences of greater goods, and compatible overall with the existence of a good God.[5]

Fichte is not attempting to defend the existence of God in the *Vocation of Man,* but we can see the connection between the traditional problem of evil and Fichte's argument about the ultimate vocation of humanity by considering the way in which evil still poses a problem for us. Even if we are not concerned with defending or disproving the existence of God in the face of evil, the existence of evils in our world still shocks us. Even if we believe that the physical world is governed largely by the workings of chance, in our actions and planning we still display a pragmatic belief in its rationality and order—after any natural disaster, for instance, the news media are still full of attempts to find meaning for the event. Significant evils—whether physical or moral—surprise us and seem to require some sort of accounting. Further, in the context of our growing technological advancement and scientific understanding of the world, the question of what evils may be laid at the doorstep of human responsibility rather than the natural order seems even more of a pressing concern. On the one hand, climate change science shows links between human actions and natural disasters; on the other hand, research in neuroscience casts doubt on how much humans really are responsible for their actions. The problem of evil, thus, is not

merely an old theological issue but a persistent problem, and can be used as a heuristic for focusing our questions about the extent of human agency and responsibility. Therefore, while Fichte himself does not take up this approach, looking at his philosophy in the *Vocation of Man* through the lens of the problem of evil and its distinction between physical and moral evil can help to clarify our interpretation of this text, and how it can still speak to us.

At first glance, it seems easy to map the traditional distinction between physical and moral evil onto Fichte's text: evil arising from nature occurs through "blind mechanism" and is unfree, such that no one is responsible for it; in contrast, evil done by human beings arises out of free agency, and thus someone must be responsible. The story may be more complicated, however, in two different ways. First, Fichte holds that nature is to be cultivated and controlled by human beings so that it is no longer a source of harm; this may imply that the continuing harm done by nature is the result of humans' failure to have sufficiently tamed nature. If this is so, the harm may be attributable to free human agency and thus is no longer an obvious instance of physical evil.

On the other hand, Fichte repeatedly states that those who fail to conform their wills to the moral law are still in the power of the mechanism of nature. Even though we must think of them as free, their actions are conceived of as part of the operation of nature and its mechanism of necessity, making them sound more like instances of physical evil.

The purpose of this chapter is thus not to develop a Fichtean account of God's doing or of religion, but to clarify the scope of *human* responsibility and complicity in evil, both physical and moral.

The Place of God

It is worth investigating, first of all, whether evil is a matter of human (as opposed to divine) responsibility for Fichte, given the reputation of the *Vocation of Man*. After all, it was written largely in reaction to the Atheism Controversy, and is known for its religious tone. As Fichte noted to his wife, he considered religion "more deeply than I have ever done" while editing the text.[6] The third part, on Faith, concludes with highly religious language, reminiscent of Augustine's *Confessions* in its being directed toward a "You" who is an "Eternal One" (*VM,* 120), a "Sublime living Will, which no name can name and no concept encompass" (*VM,* 111). In his choice of language, Fichte evokes the idea of a God who has a divine plan that we should seek to align ourselves with even though we can never comprehend it entirely. Faith in this sort of God would provide support for faith in our vocation—even though all seems dark, God has matters in hand, in some sort of sublime mystery.

On the other hand, considered within the scope of Fichte's philosophy as a whole, the importance of human agency reasserts itself. In Fichte's 1798 essay, "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World," which spurred the atheism controversy, Fichte doesn't claim that God created the moral world-order, but rather "*is* the moral world-order."[7] Curtis Bowman points out that "God, if we bother to use the term at all, can be nothing other than the moral world-order produced by the self-positing activity of the I."[8] With respect to *The Vocation of Man,* Ives Radrizzani argues that "the God of the third book of the *Vocation of Man* occupies exactly the place devoted to the pure will in the *nova methodo* and coincides with it."[9] Consequently, "God can only be said to be the transsubjective basis of the human community as a transcendental idea of practical reason."[10]The "God" in the text is not the theist God, but simply "the order and law of the supersensible world."[11]

If this is the case, then the problem of evil in Fichte's thought takes on the more modern character alluded to above—the problem of our ability to make sense of the world, not the existence of a theist God per se. Even taking the text at face value, though, we see that Fichte does not claim that God will deal with evil; the religious language ultimately points to the work to be undertaken by the human species as a whole.

What exactly we are responsible for, and how far can our hope for the eradication of evil extend? Even if Fichte's arguments are not seen in the context of a traditional theodicy or defense of God, they still echo the traditional arguments in theodicy, since they still depend on a view of the world as ultimately rationally ordered. We cannot act if we view the world as absurd, our actions all for naught: "[A]s a rational being, which is already given a purpose through its mere decision, I cannot act simply for nothing, for the sake of nothing" (*VM,* 92).

In the *Vocation of Man,* Fichte appeals to a supersensible or supernatural world as the ultimate justification for our vocation (*VM,* 91–97, esp. 94–95), such that even if our conscience-motivated actions in the sensible world go awry, they are still redeemed through their consequences in the supersensible world (*VM,* 95). This supersensible world is our true home (*VM,* 96), not the flawed earthly world (see *VM,* 81, 96). The status of this claim, with its implied metaphysical dualism, is hard to interpret, but regardless of the ontological status of the supersensible world, the hope it generates gives us the courage to go on acting in the earthly, sensible world. To redeem this hope, we need to act morally, but we also need to make the world itself—nature itself—conform to reason. In order to understand what this will entail, let us return to the traditional language of the problem of evil.

Blurring the Distinctions—Rousseau, the Lisbon Earthquake, and *Contemporary Disasters*

The distinction between moral and physical evil hinges on the distinction between those beings that are free and those which are not. It assumes that the evil caused by nature is distinct from that caused by free agents. This is reasonably straightforward in the context of guidance for orienting ourselves to the afterlife rather than concern with how we physically reshape our earthly environment. It becomes more difficult when we see ourselves not as innocent victims of harm but as complicit in the state of our surroundings. We can see this play out in Rousseau's response to the Lisbon earthquake.

Church leaders attributed the Lisbon earthquake, which destroyed almost two-thirds of the city and killed anywhere from ten thousand to sixty thousand people (depending on the source),[12] to just retribution for sin, applying arguments familiar from Augustine. Voltaire criticized this view, arguing that surely those in Lisbon had no more vices than those in London or Paris. Those who suffered—particularly the children—had committed no crime or error, and it was heartless to claim that the disaster was the result of God being constrained by eternal laws.[13]

Rousseau worried that Voltaire's poem could lead one to despair, since denying an understanding of the quake as divinely sanctioned seemed to suggest that there was no way to make sense of, or respond to, suffering.[14] Voltaire was correct to assert that the earthquake was not divine retribution for sin, but wrong to disconnect it entirely from human action and human moral responsibility. Saying that the source of moral evil was in humanity, and that "most of our physical misfortunes are again our own work,"[15] Rousseau argued that the damage and suffering from the earthquake would not have been as great had the city been constructed differently.

In other words, something that fits the model of being a standard physical evil—a natural disaster—can also be understood as a moral evil, the result of human actions. As Rousseau

wrote, “For me, I see everywhere that the misfortunes that nature subjects us to are much less cruel than those which we add to them.”[16] If they are our doing, however, then that implies we can work to fix them.

Complicity in Physical Evil

In addition to shaking confidence in God, the Lisbon earthquake also shook confidence in the Enlightenment idea of nature as “well ordered and good,”[17] and there for our purposes. Writing in the aftermath of this shaken confidence, Fichte sees nature, in its uncultivated state, as an opponent to freedom and reason.[18] If we seek a rational order to the world, it will not come from nature itself, but from reason’s triumph over nature. Throughout his works, he tells us that it is part of our moral duty to cultivate nature and bring it under our control.[19] In the *System of Ethics,* in particular, he writes that “the entire sensible world is to come under the dominion of reason, to be the tool of reason in the hands of rational beings. But everything in this sensible world is connected with everything else; hence no part of it stands entirely and without restriction under the dominion of reason unless all the parts do so” (*SE,* 285). Consequently, everything in nature should be made into someone’s property, such that “all of nature is comprehended and grasped under this unified will” (the unified will of all rational agents) (*SE,* 285). As we saw above, it is not God’s task, but ours, to solve the problem of physical evil and make nature into our tool rather than our opponent. The question, then, is whether we can be held to account for the physical evil that remains while we have not yet achieved a rational order.

In Fichte’s earlier work, such as the *Lectures on the Scholar’s Vocation,* it seems as though the task is supposed to be unending: we are instructed to overcome nature not because Fichte expects that we will ever succeed, but because it is a task that serves as part of our moral vocation as individuals; it gives each of us a direction in life, an ideal to pursue. He tells us that

our "struggle with nature" is "a war that can never end" (*EPW,* 164).[20] The fact that we shall never achieve our goal is not something to be disconsolate about, but rather a source of strength. Because the task we are called to by our vocation will never come to an end, we ourselves become eternal through participation in our vocation.[21]

If this is the case, then the current physical evil remaining in the world is not something that we ought to be blamed for, even though, as it is part of our vocation to overcome it, we can still be said to be responsible for it. It is at least not a failure, if our task is understood as literally unending, literally eternal. The presence of physical evil in the world should not thus cause us to question the fundamental rationality of it all, but should remind us of our ongoing vocation.

Our vocation is described differently in the *Vocation of Man*. In this text, the complete cultivation of all nature is described as something that could actually occur, and Fichte argues that we must think of it as something that will actually occur, in order to make sense of the world right now. He describes those natural disasters that still plague us as "nothing other than the last resistance of the wild mass against the lawful, life-giving purposeful march of progress…nothing other than the last convulsive strokes in the formation of our planet, which is now reaching completion" (*VM,* 82). If this is the case, then the remaining physical evils in our world are not mere reminders of our vocation, but also reminders that we have not yet finished what we are expected to complete.

Fichte sees the complete subjugation of nature as a natural continuation of a process that is already going on, and thus does not give an argument for his optimism in this regard. It is now more than two hundred years since the publication of *Vocation of Man,* and we are far from having achieved what Fichte described as "a condition which allows one to calculate and reckon safely on its regular pace" (*VM,* 83). To what extent are we responsible for this failure?

In his response to Voltaire, Rousseau pointed to human responsibility for the consequences of human action, even if these seem to be manifest as physical events. On this line of reasoning, we could be said to be responsible today for sins of commission—choosing to build in certain areas prone to disaster, pumping greenhouse gases into the air, pumping toxic chemicals into rivers. We would then see the harmful results of these not as physical evil, but as moral evil.

If we conceive of the unruliness of nature as the failure of our moral duty to have cultivated it entirely, then we must also consider the evil that results from our failure. In this case, the harms caused by sins of omission—failing to build adequate levees, or failing to plan adequately for drought—would also be seen as instances of moral evil. If it is the case that all of nature shall be brought under the dominion of reason, then physical evil as a whole reduces to moral evil.

But how should we take this claim, in the *Vocation of Man,* that nature *will* in fact one day be entirely under our control? The 2010 eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which created an ash cloud that disrupted flights for weeks, serves as a potent reminder of the power of nature to unexpectedly shut down our normal activities. Philip Alcabes, discussing our fear of epidemics and our inability to truly plan for them, argues that nature is always able to come up with new, unforeseen threats.[22] Fichte's optimism seems misplaced: it is either the result of an incorrect empirical assumption, or it is interwoven with a metaphysical assumption about the completability of our task that is discontinuous with his earlier work.

Let us reconfigure the question away from speculation about the future and back to what it means for our ability to live in the world now. The purpose of Fichte's text is not to explain physical evil, but to point to the mission of human beings and spur them to action. It is not up to God to save us, since the point is not the particular arrangement of the world itself, but that this arrangement be the result of free human action.[23] If the point of the world were solely for humans

to live peacefully and untroubled by evil, then, as Fichte writes, "freedom would then not only be in vain but it would even interfere and the good will would be quite superfluous. The world would have been arranged most clumsily and would proceed toward its goal wastefully and circuitously" (*VM,* 93). This echoes Kant's claim in the *Groundwork* that if happiness were our purpose in life, then nature has been arranged particularly badly.[24] To understand Fichte properly, we should not focus on the metaphysical possibility of the actual overcoming of nature, but on our own practical responsibility.

It is our freedom that allows us to take responsibility for the natural world. In order to understand how to conceive of our responsibility or guilt with respect to the natural world and what would normally be conceived of as physical evil, we need to turn to the question of our freedom as moral agents, and thus the possibility of moral evil.

Moral Evil and the Mechanism of Nature

According to the *System of Ethics,* insofar as we ourselves are organic wholes that are part of nature, we possess a drive for self-preservation (*SE,* 117). When we aim at enjoyment or satisfying appetites, we are primarily exercising this drive—the natural drive. Our ability to reflect about ourselves, however, shows that we are not limited to these actions or these aims. Our tendency to reflection and to resolving to determine ourselves through reason can be expressed as a pure, spiritual drive.

From the standpoint of philosophy, these two drives are the same original drive, which is itself the result of my own free action, experienced by me in two different ways (*SE,* 124–25). I can experience the drive as the natural drive and myself to be an object within the framework of natural causality; or I can experience the drive as spiritual and myself as a subject. The difference between the two lies in my own reflection. When I reflect upon myself, I as reflecting

subject stand against myself as object (*SE,* 125). I am thus not part of nature, but stand against nature. By determining my will, I am thus something more than merely part of the grand chain of causality (see *SE,* 147). Our task as humans is ultimately to unify our desires such that our actions as natural agents are aligned with our rational determination.

By the third section of the *Vocation of Man,* Fichte seems once more to be working with this sort of framework, after having explored the ramifications of thinking of ourselves as objects in the first section, and pure knowing subjects in the second. Our thoughts and inclinations emerge from our drives. If we are not aware of this, our drives compel us, but once we do become aware, then we begin to shape our thinking freely; as he writes, "[T]he compulsion disappears as soon as it is seen" (*VM,* 73). Our vocation, of course, is to come to see it.

In order to grasp the meaning of our vocation, we must have already understood that we are free despite appearances. But if we have not yet done this, how can we even begin to start? As Kierkegaard wrote forty years later, "[I]t would indeed be unreasonable to require a person to find out all by himself that he does not exist"[25]—in Fichtean words, that he was not yet truly a free self-determining self. In reflecting freely upon ourselves, we stand against nature; in failing to have done this, we are consequently still within the grip of nature, not in control of ourselves (*VM,* 119).

Fichte argues that we should not be disconcerted by those who engage in "unreason and vice," since they are "not in control of themselves" and we should not be "angry with blind nature devoid of will" (*VM,* 119). If these human beings are not really free, then the moral evil in the world is the result of those human beings who are still within the power of the mechanism of nature. Fichte seems to mean this quite seriously, as he writes that out of duty, "I must always

treat them and speak with them as though they were free, knowing very well that they are not" (*VM,* 120).

If this is the case, however, then the distinction between moral and physical evil again becomes unclear. We saw earlier that physical evil ultimately becomes the responsibility of free moral agents, and thus can be understood in the context of moral evil. But now it seems as though moral evil can be seen as part of the mechanism of nature, and thus as an instance of physical evil. If this is so, then responsibility for evil would seem to disappear altogether.

This would not be a desirable Fichtean outcome. There are two levels at which to understand the claim about unfree human agents. The first is advice about where the reader should focus his or her energy; it is Fichte's counsel that we should not despair that we cannot convince everyone of the existence of our vocation. This is fitting in an exhortatory text such as the *Vocation of Man,* and further echoes Fichtean advice elsewhere to accept that not all philosophers will be capable of idealism, but will rather remain dogmatists (*IWL,* 20). As such, it is primarily counsel against annoyance or indignation, and not a claim about responsibility for evil.

The second level is a claim that Fichte seems to be making about whether these humans are really free or not. His language in this section seems to indicate that they are not free, regardless of how duty compels us to treat them; as he writes, "[W]hat they really are [*was sie wirklich sind*] does not deserve this anger" (*VM,* 119/*BM(pb),* 155). He distinguishes between the anger we may feel against vice in our capacities as social actors and the calm detachment we should take as observers, further highlighting the way in which even if we take wrongdoers to task in the social realm, this may not be reflective of their (lack of) true responsibility (*VM,* 120). Most damning, he writes "once they are what they are, they cannot in the least behave otherwise than they do" (*VM,* 119).

Despite this, however, it is important to remember that Fichte never actually counsels giving up on these agents. Two pages later, he tells us that "there is no human being but only one humanity, no individual thinking and loving and hating, but only one thinking and loving and hating in and through each other" (*VM,* 121). It is true that we cannot make others free, and thus that we should not necessarily expect our "noble indignation" to succeed in rousing them to acknowledgment of their own freedom.

Fichte reminds us that we "cannot ascribe a lack of freedom to them without already presupposing that they are free to make themselves free," and that it is their "fault and disgrace" that they are in this situation (*VM,* 119). On Fichte's view of the radical freedom of humanity, all it means to be within the grip of the mechanism of nature is that agents allow themselves to be, since all experience of limitation by the not-I is ultimately the result of their own free activity. Whatever an agent's past, she can still determine herself anew through her actions.

Consequently, no human can be left behind in fulfilling our vocation. We can acknowledge that the temptation of thinking of oneself as unfree is strong, as it is easy, in the face of the calamities in the world, to believe that they are unavoidable and thus to despairingly allow oneself instead to drift along with natural causality. But this is precisely what we must not do.

While Fichte writes that he has fallen "into the midst of absolute incomprehensibility" (*VM,* 119), the clue to emerging from such incomprehensibility lies in what it takes for us to make ourselves free. We can escape incomprehensibility by focusing on action, and on the actions of others. Our initial awareness of our own freedom comes as a result of a summons to freedom by another free agent and relies on our upbringing as human beings (*FNR,* 29–39). As Fichte makes clear, from the *Lectures on the Scholar's Vocation* through to the *Foundations of Natural Right,* we are only humans among other humans. Consequently, when we think of facing evil, we must

not think of facing it alone. This encouragement can give us the strength to pull ourselves up from mechanistic despair.

This move—requiring the presence of other human beings in order to be a proper human being oneself—is characteristic of Fichte's philosophy. But it also points to the way in which Fichte's philosophy transforms the question of the problem of evil. It is not about any particular human being's struggle with evil, but rather what we must all do together. Further, Fichte's insistence on the importance of practical reason means that it does not matter so much whether we can wrap our minds around the general idea of agents who are free but nonetheless in the grip of blind mechanism, but on how we carry out our duties to the ones that we encounter, treating them—despite our indignation at their vice—as necessary participants in the vocation of all humanity, and thus perhaps tempering our anger with compassion.

It is human beings who are responsible for the state of the world. As long as we are actively taking up our vocation, we are actively creating the world in which evil is eradicated—this is a way of interpreting what Fichte means by saying the supersensible world is with us now. Together, the human species accomplishes the ordering of the world.

The Scope of Human Responsibility

Of course, this sounds a little optimistic in the face of the very real uncertainties that surround us. The problem of evil has always emerged in the face of human sorrow over the evils we encounter, and any answer we give has to help us make sense of it. Looking at Fichte's account of the vocation of man as an answer to the problem of evil helps to point us to an interpretation of Fichte's text that can speak to us today, and clarifies the nature of responsibility by turning us away from pure theory and toward practice. Both kinds of evil traditionally described within the problem of evil are only to be resolved through our own actions, and both underscore our own

responsibility for the world as a whole. This responsibility goes beyond anything we might individually have consented to or have had control over. The challenge that comes by accepting this connects us with the rest of our species; we can only grasp it by turning to how we can aid each other in our collective responsibility. Fichte shows us that in order to understand responsibility for evil we need to consider the role of the human community as a whole.

The problem of evil leads many to question God's existence, but at the root it is the question of how we make sense of the absurdity of the world. The choice often seems between facing it stoically or, at best, for theists, recognizing that at least God suffers with us, but Fichte gives us a mission. If Fichte is right, we must not despair, but rather summon added courage in the quest to fulfill our vocation as human beings.

Notes

1. He characterizes the killing in war as murder (*VM,* 83), echoing his prohibition against the use of snipers (and unnecessary killing) in war in the second appendix to the *Foundations of Natural Right* (*FNR,* 328).
2. See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), for a notable recent articulation of this argument, which can also be found in Augustine (*Confessions* 7.3 and 7.16) and Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* 1a, Q. 49, 1 ad. 3).
3. We can see this response in Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a, Q.49, 2.
4. Augustine, *Confessions* 7.3.
5. Objections to these arguments include J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955): 200–12, which shows that these arguments against the problem of evil are logically inconsistent with God's omnipotence.

6. Letter to Johanna Fichte, 5 November 1799, quoted in Ives Radrizzani, "The Place of the *Vocation of Man* in Fichte's work," in *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena* Wissenschaftslehre*,* ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 319.

7. Curtis Bowman, "Fichte, Jacobi, and the Atheism Controversy," in *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena* Wissenschaftslehre*,* 290. The sentence continues: "that God cannot be conceived apart from the moral world-order."

8. Ibid., 290.

9. Radrizzani, 335.

10. Ibid., 336.

11. Ibid., 335. Radrizzani goes on to point out that Fichte does not claim any knowledge, as such, of God. Similarly, he does not claim knowledge, as such, of the network of individual human vocations that makes up the bond between all human actions. See Radrizzani, 336: "the idea of a bond between all human enterprise, of a harmony between the diverse particular vocations that criss-cross, in short, the idea of a moral order, is simply part of the argument of belief and not of knowledge."

12. Claudia Sanides-Kohlrausch, "The Lisbon Earthquake, 1755: A Discourse about the 'Nature' of Nature," in *Is Nature Ever Evil?,* ed. Willem B. Drees (New York: Routledge, 2003), 108.

13. Voltaire, "Poem on the Lisbon Disaster, or: An Examination of that Axiom, 'All is Well'" (1756).

14. Rousseau suggested that Voltaire's poem tells us, "Suffer forever, unfortunate one. If it is a God that created you, doubtless he is all-powerful; he could have prevented all

your misfortunes. Don't, therefore, hope for them to end, for one wouldn't ever know why you exist, if it is not to suffer and die." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *"Lettre de J. J. Rousseau à M. de Voltaire,"* 18 August 1756, *Oeuvres Complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau,* vol. 4 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969), 1060 (translation mine).

15. Ibid., 1061.

16. Ibid., 1062.

17. Sanides-Kohlrausch, 114.

18. As he writes in *SE* 108…109, "Nature as such…is characterized by its opposition to freedom."

19. In addition to *VM* 82–83, see "Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation," in *EPW,* 163–65; *FNR,* 189 ("promoting organization in nature is the very foundation of the state"); and *SE,* 263, 285.

20. The text continues: "so long as we are not supposed to become gods. However, nature's influence should and can become weaker and weaker, whereas reason's dominion should and can become stronger and stronger."

21. J.G. Fichte, "Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation," *EPW,* 168. As he writes, "Once I assume this lofty task I will never complete it. Therefore, just as surely as it is my vocation to assume this task, I can never cease *to act* and thus I can never cease *to be*." Our unending vocation makes us eternal: "For I have seized my vocation, and it is more permanent than you [nature's tumult]. It is eternal, and so am I!" (*EPW,* 169).

22. Philip Alcabes, *Dread* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 186.

23. "It no longer seems to me that the final purpose of the present world that a state of universal peace among men and their unconditional control of the mechanism of nature be

produced merely for its own sake, but rather that it be produced by human beings themselves" (*VM,* 113).

24. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4:395.

25. Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments,* ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 22.