

Conflicting Process Theodicies

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the process theodicies of David Ray Griffin and Philip Clayton. It explains their differences on such issues as God's primordial power and voluntary self-limitation, creativity as an independent metaphysical principle that limits God, creation out of nothing or out of chaos, and God's voluntary causal naturalism. Difficulties with their positions are discussed. The Clayton-Knapp "no-not-once" principle is explained, and a more comprehensive theodicy is outlined.

The Problem of Evil

Process or panentheistic thinkers agree about many significant things, but disagree on others. David Ray Griffin is a panentheist (*Panentheism*), but Philip Clayton prefers the label open panentheism (*Adventures* 175–84 and ch. 11). Both are process or temporalistic theists. But they disagree about how to resolve problems of theodicy, the age-old problem of evil—how to reconcile the hideous evils, sufferings, and losses that occur in the world with the reality of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and morally good or perfect God. The problem of evil may be resolved by denying either the power (omnipotence) of God, or the knowledge of God (omniscience), or the goodness of God, or the reality of evil—or the existence of God.

Griffin and Clayton have published profusely on the problem of theodicy. Their highly influential positions are in serious conflict. They agree that God exists necessarily and is morally good or perfect. They accentuate the reality of evil and will not allow it to be rationalized away. They agree that God does not know future free decisions that have not yet been made because they are simply not yet there to be known. They acknowledge that God does not stop evils from happening, but they account for this in very different ways. Both are greatly troubled because God does nothing to prevent the very real natural and moral evils of the world. They wonder why a good God does not “save us from all ills.” Good human parents, they argue, would intervene to prevent their children from being harmed by immanent dangers. Yet, God does not do this for us. Why not? If a good God has the power to prevent moral and natural evils like Hitler,

the Holocaust, rapes, murders, tortures, diseases, tsunamis, earthquakes, and innumerable natural disasters, why didn't or doesn't she?

The theodicies of Griffin and Clayton are very complex, but also very distinct. This article contrasts and reflects critically upon some of their most pertinent claims.

Four Significant Differences between Griffin and Clayton

1. God's Impotence or Deliberate Self-Limitation

Does God have the power to prevent evils? Griffin and Clayton deplore the "fact" that the omnipotent God of traditional theism has the power to prevent evils, but does not. This generates serious problems for theodicy. Clayton thinks that God has the primordial power to prevent evils; Griffin disagrees. The common process view is that "being is power" (efficient causation), just as Plato said. The issue is whether all such power belongs primordially to God alone, or to God plus everlastingly coexistent universes.

Griffin thinks that God never had sufficient powers of efficient causation to prevent evil, but he does not deny God's efficient causal power altogether. He acknowledges with Whitehead that efficient causation is involved when God provides finite actual entities with initial aims that lure them toward goodness (Griffin, *God, Power* 280–81), so he accepts a small degree of *transcendent* causation. He calls this "persuasive efficient causation" (Griffin, *Evil* 99, 101). But his God lacks sufficient causal power to do anything more than this. Griffin's God necessarily, not voluntarily, lacks the power to determine "unilaterally" any actual events or states of affairs within the world (*Panentheism* 81). God necessarily lacks "coercive efficient causation" (Griffin, *Evil* 101). "In coercion," Griffin says, "the effect is completely determined by the efficient causation upon it," but God cannot completely determine anything all alone (*Evil* 102). Griffin's God has persuasive but not coercive causal power. God has no power to make anything happen except through persuasion. Persuasion occurs as God provides actual entities with attractive open possibilities or "initial aims" for making their own decisions (Griffin, *God, Power* 280–81). "The central negative of process theism," says Griffin, is "that God cannot coerce" (*God, Power* 96, 108). Thus, "the divine power is persuasive alone" (*God, Power* 108). Griffin denies God's omnipotence as traditionally understood (*God Exists* 245), but he suggests the term can be redefined as "perfect power," which would be persuasive power alone.

Philip Clayton disagrees. He thinks that God has sufficient causal power to prevent evil, but does not use it. The distinction between *having* “all power” and *using* it is very important, as even Griffin acknowledges (*Panentheism* 131). Clayton agrees with traditional theists and today’s Open Theists that God *has* the power to do anything logically intelligible. Clayton (with Steven Knapp) describes God (the Ultimate) as “what we have every reason to regard (prior to its own self-limitation) as a being of infinite power” (*Predicament* 39). The traditional God of predestination has infinite power and uses it. Clayton’s God has it but does not *use* it—for moral and other reasons. Clayton agrees with Griffin that God acts in the world only through persuasion (*Adventures* 197–98).

Unlike Griffin, Clayton affirms that God *deliberately self-limits* his own power. God generously gives away some power to contingent individuals (but not to aggregates) so that they can be free, self-determining, origina-tive, cocreative, self-developing, and morally responsible. God enables us to choose between good and evil (and much else). We and other creatures can misuse our freedom and inflict evil on others or ourselves (the “free will defense”). Our evil decisions originate with us, not with God. Clayton would agree with Griffin that freedom or creativity extends all the way down from persons and animals to cells, atoms, subatomic particles, and so forth (or to the occasions or actual entities that compose them) (*Panentheism* 30–32). Griffin regards this universal freedom as metaphysically necessary. Clayton sees it as a gift from God. Griffin insists that “the fact that there is a world of actual entities with *some* power is not contingent upon a divine decision” (*Panentheism* 96). Clayton thinks that it is. Griffin believes that because power belongs inherently and necessarily to both God and creatures, God cannot withdraw or suspend it (*Panentheism* 122). Clayton thinks that God could but does not for moral reasons.

2. Independent or Dependent Creativity

Is all power located primordially within God and then derived from God? Griffin thinks not. For Griffin, efficient causal power and creativity seem to be indistinguishable. He thinks that creative causal power is a coexisting, independent, and necessary metaphysical force that makes it impossible for God to intervene in natural processes to prevent evil. God could not have created (or ordered) any other kind of world (Griffin, *Panentheism* 124–25). He writes, “If all creatures essentially have some power to determine themselves and to influence other things, God cannot unilaterally determine any state of affairs” (Griffin, *Evil* 23). God cannot

unilaterally cause anything to happen within the world. All events in any universe would be partly self-creative because creativity is a universal and necessary metaphysical reality or force that exists and functions independently of God, not because of God. All individuals (actual occasions) are partly self-creative, but not because God freely makes them that way. Creativity is simply a “metaphysical given” (Griffin, *Evil* 119) alongside God. With Whitehead (as he interprets him), Griffin recognizes “Two Ultimates: God and Creativity.” Griffin asserts, “The distinctive feature of Whitehead’s position is that God and creativity are equally primordial” (*Panentheism* 255), but this may be a misinterpretation of Whitehead. Griffin says, “We finite actualities do not have our creativity—our power to exert self-causation and other-causation—because God granted it to us (in which case God could cancel it). Rather, creativity belongs to the world as eternally as it belongs to God” (*God Exists* 252).

Clayton, by contrast, has only one primordial ultimate, God, in whom all creative power is originally located. Individual creatures have it because God voluntarily gives it to them. It is a gift, not a metaphysical necessity. Any God subject to external powers would not be God, Clayton insists. God generously shares creativity with others through self-limitation. With Griffin in mind, Clayton says, “Clearly the theodicy that Knapp and I have developed from the standpoint of open panentheism relies crucially on divine self-limitation” (*Adventures* 179). He asks whether some ultimate “Ground” of reality like creativity is located outside of God (as Griffin affirms), or within God, or is identical with God. He rejects the first, suggesting that such an ultimate “would not be God,” while acknowledging that “process thought has tended to separate Creativity and God.” He rejects the third because there is much more to God (e.g., all of God’s personal qualities) than creativity. His position is that “we should speak of a Ground *within* God” (Clayton, *Adventures* 167).

3. Creation Out of Chaos or Creation Out of Nothing

Griffin persistently rejects God’s original creation of our universe *ex nihilo*. This is not biblical, is not taught in Genesis or elsewhere in the Bible (Griffin, *Panentheism* 100, 102–04). The main difficulty, however, is that creativity as a universal metaphysical necessity rules out “unilateral” creation out of nothing. Creativity is an inherent ingredient of creation itself not derived from God, so it must *always* be instantiated in realities other than God. It *always* exists in some world independently of God,

so God's "creating" our world can only mean that God brought order out of some preexistent chaos. Our own universe was created (ordered by persuasion) out of ashes of a collapsing antecedent universe (Griffin, *God, Power* 285–86, *Evil* 23, and *Panentheism* 258–59).

Griffin is committed implicitly if not explicitly to a series of oscillating universes going back to infinity. A finite set of antecedent expanding/collapsing universes would have to start somewhere—with creation out of nothing. So "in the beginning," Griffin claims, God did nothing more than lure or persuade a preexisting but relatively formless Big Crunch chaos to form the well-ordered universe in which we live. Without exerting any efficient causation beyond persuasion, this may not be as easy as it sounds! Griffin admits that "in a situation approaching absolute chaos the divine power could have coercive-like effects" (*Religion* 308), and "[i]n the first instant of a particular universe, accordingly, divine evocative power could produce quasi-coercive effects" (*Panentheism* 91). So why not go all the way to real efficient causation and affirm that God created our universe *ex nihilo*? Clearly, that is the way Clayton sees it.

Griffin's most serious reason for denying creation *ex nihilo* seems to be that if God had enough power to create a universe out of nothing, that is, if God were "omnipotent" as traditionally understood, God could intervene at any time in worldly processes, suspend the laws of nature, and prevent any and every creature from being harmed in any way. Since God obviously does not intervene, Griffin concludes that God must not have the power to do it (*Panentheism* 25, 27, 101, 107, 109).

Since Clayton affirms creation *ex nihilo*, he obviously does not agree. Clayton thinks that God had the power to create our universe out of nothing, and he did. God also has the power to work miracles, but he does not. Why not? This is Clayton's predicament. His response will be examined shortly.

Clayton is not committed to Griffin's infinity of preceding universes. He decisively affirms creation *ex nihilo*. He rejects the now standard process view, Griffin's view, that our universe was preceded by and created out of the Big Crunch chaos of an antecedent collapsing universe, which was in turn preceded by other universes all the way back to infinity. "But, in contrast to many process theologians," he writes, "I find myself compelled also to defend the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*—the belief that there has not always been a world, and hence that the world is not coeternal with God" (Clayton, *Adventures* 175). He acknowledges the Big Bang, but not as resulting from the chaotic residues of a preceding universe. Rather,

he associates the Big Bang with a “Creator God” who is “not less than personal” (Clayton, *Adventures* 106, 193–194, 205, 241).

Unlike Griffin’s, Clayton’s God is classically omnipotent and has the efficient causal power to produce effects of momentous proportions unilaterally like working miracles and creating universes out of nothing. Clayton’s panentheistic God limits his power and abstains from miracles voluntarily, not necessarily. Clayton also knows the Bible does not teach creation *ex nihilo*, but he affirms it anyway because it “more powerfully conveys the most radical contingency of created things; they exist out of no necessity of their nature, but only in and through their relationship with the final Ground” (*Adventures* 183). As explained shortly, Clayton thinks he can resolve the “argument from neglect” (why God does not intervene to prevent evil) without denying God’s classical omnipotence or appealing to an independent metaphysical force that stands in God’s way.

4. *Metaphysical or Voluntary Causal Naturalism*

Surprisingly, Clayton agrees with Griffin that all events within the world have purely natural causes (allowing, of course, for persuasive initial aims caused by God). For very different reasons, they affirm not simply that “All events have causes,” but that “All events have *natural* causes” (Clayton, *Adventures*).

Griffin’s own “principle of universal causation” is by definition naturalistic. It affirms “every event is causally influenced by previous events and then exerts influence on future events” (Griffin, *God Exists* 246). So all events within spacetime are caused solely by other events within spacetime. His “universal principle of causation” means that all events have *natural* causes and *only* natural causes—but with one very slight exception. As noted, Griffin allows a place so small that scientists would not notice it for efficiently caused “initial aims” and divine persuasion. His universal principle of naturalistic causation alone is metaphysical and thus would be true in every possible universe, Griffin insists. His position “affirms not only that supernatural interruptions never do occur but also that they are not even possible” (Griffin, *Panentheism* 69). Even the cosmological or empirical laws of nature discovered by natural science allow everything to “be predicted almost exactly,” except for very minor variations of “quantum indeterminacies” (Griffin, *Evil* 217), so they are nearly as absolute as “All events have natural causes.”

Conversely, Clayton thinks that natural laws result from divine decisions. Still, like Griffin, he pronounces them to be nearly absolute. He

declares, “[I]f God is to remain consistent with God’s own nature, God is now constrained by those decisions, which means that God’s present power is further limited” (Clayton, *Adventures* 106–07). The net results of their positions are almost identical, but for very different reasons. Clayton concedes, somewhat reluctantly perhaps, that *God could, but would not*, interrupt the laws of nature to perform miracles. To the question, “Is it metaphysically possible that God could suspend natural laws and regularities?” Clayton replies, “I suppose that one must answer in the affirmative” (*Adventures* 226). Like Griffin, though, Clayton believes that miraculous interruptions never happen. Both affirm that, once given, the basic laws of causation and nature do not change and are never interrupted. God *could* not do it, says Griffin. God *would* not do it, says Clayton. But why not?

Clayton offers a *theological* reason for affirming that all natural events have only natural causes (making proper allowances for God as the source of initial aims). He contends that once God has created the laws of nature, God cannot change the divine mind about them, for if God did, God would violate the divine nature. He explains, “Features of the created world that might have been otherwise, such as certain laws of nature, represent free divine decisions. But if God is to remain consistent with God’s own nature, God is now constrained by those decisions, which means that God’s present power is further limited” (Clayton, *Adventures* 106–07). Clayton affirms that “physical regularities are already expressions of the fundamental constancy of the divine character” (*Adventures* 107). Griffin’s position is the same as Clayton’s. Griffin also proclaims that if God were to interrupt the “most basic causal patterns” obtaining in the universe, this would “be in violation of God’s very nature” (*Panentheism* 3).

Critical Reflections

About the above issues, many important questions must be asked. At what point in the development of an emerging and evolutionary universe did the cosmological laws that God could not change without violating the divine nature become fixed? And might not God’s moral and spiritual *nature* sometimes *require* interventions? Traditional and today’s Open Temporalistic Theists claim that God’s benevolent nature would at times *require* intervention and temporary suspensions of natural laws. Griffin and Clayton really do not settle this issue simply by decreeing otherwise, but there are many additional problems.

1. Circularity

Is absolutizing natural efficient causation and cosmic laws to rule out miracles completely question-begging, squarely circular? At stake here is precisely whether any events have nonnatural causes. Traditionalists regard at least some biblical and extra-biblical miracle stories as strong evidence against the saying “All events have only natural causes.” How do Griffin and Clayton know that they are wrong, that God did not cause some of these unusual events? Their answer is: God did not cause them *because* all events have only natural causes. But that is precisely the question, not its resolution.

2. Inconceivability

Griffin defines metaphysical principles as those to which “we cannot conceive any alternatives,” thus “they are necessary,” and “would obtain in any possible universe (cosmic epoch)” (*God Exists* 245, 258). Griffin’s causal naturalism is metaphysical. It excludes miracles as events “brought about directly by God as primary cause, without the employment of secondary causes” (Griffin, *Panentheism* 57) because they are *inconceivable*. But is this really true? Clearly, miracles are not inconceivable to everyone, not to traditionalists, not to today’s Open Theists, and not to Clayton. Clayton denies only their existence, not their conceivability.

What does Griffin assume about those who seem to have no difficulty conceiving of miracles? Are they just stupid, self-deceived, prejudiced, or what? Is being “inconceivable to Griffin” anything more than a personal eccentricity? More seriously, Griffin really is advancing a thoughtful theoretical explanation deserving to be considered on its own merits. Logically, however, if any proposition is conceivable, its contradictory is also conceivable. Thus, if “Miracles cannot happen” is logically conceivable, then “Miracles can happen” is logically conceivable. Whether or not they actually do happen is another matter, but conceivability as such is not easily dismissed. Except for creation *ex nihilo*, Clayton denies only the actuality of unilaterally caused divine effects, not their conceivability.

3. Undermining Science, or Not

Both Griffin and Clayton contend that questioning the inviolability of the laws of nature would undermine science itself, but is this really true? Clayton insists that “[d]ivine intervention” would “undercut the practice of science” and that “theists should at least seek to avoid affirming positions on divine action that clash head-on with the scientific method

and the specific results of the sciences" (*Adventures* 178, 219). Most scientists probably do presuppose that all natural events have natural causes; as Griffin put it, "there are no supernatural interruptions of the world's normal cause-effect relations" (*God Exists* 44), and any other supposition would be very unscientific. This is the very essence of "naturalism" as Griffin (*Panentheism* 49) and Clayton (*Adventures* 220) understand it. But what kind of a presupposition is this? Does "the practice of science" presuppose methodological or metaphysical naturalism?

Methodological naturalism acknowledges that natural scientists require only *the imperative*, "Look for natural causes, and keep on looking," in order to go forward with their work. *Metaphysical naturalism* claims that scientists absolutely cannot do their work as scientists without an *a priori, non-empirical, ontological guarantee in advance* that they could (in principle) *always* find what they are looking for. Griffin insists on metaphysical naturalism, but why cannot real scientists go forward with their work perfectly well with nothing more than methodological naturalism? Griffin's naturalism is actually philosophical metaphysics, not natural science. He rejects methodological naturalism, partly because it would allow for supernatural interventions, but mainly because "[t]he ideological leaders of the scientific community emphatically do *not* accept the view that their naturalism is purely methodological" (Griffin, *Panentheism* 54).

Clayton, by contrast, affirms only methodological naturalism, understood to be "a rule governing how we ought to think about what happens in our universe." According to Clayton, "It is important to recognize that the presumption of naturalism is methodological not metaphysical, because otherwise the presumption would be arbitrary, a matter of (nonreligious) faith or dogma." Yet, he warns against overestimating the significance of this distinction (Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament* 7).

Maybe the distinction between metaphysical and methodological naturalism really is of great significance. Even if the "ideological leaders" of natural science strongly prefer metaphysical to methodological naturalism, we know perfectly well that scientific ideologists have been wrong before. Both determinism and reductionism were once fundamental parts of the ideology of science. Process thinkers have abandoned them, but many scientists and philosophers still cling to them in the name of science. No matter how widespread, Griffin's ideology of necessary natural causation could be, in Clayton's words, only "arbitrary, a matter of (nonreligious) faith or dogma" (Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament* 7). Do or should

natural scientists really judge what is necessary and what is impossible in all possible worlds?

Developing a “naturalistic” theism that will not turn away natural scientists is highly commendable as a recruiting strategy, but in all honesty, methodological naturalism is all that scientists really need to do their work. Beyond that we have only ideological dogmatism.

4. An Infinity of Antecedent Universes, or Not

Creation *ex nihilo* may be avoided in other ways, but Griffin does it by postulating a single strand of successive oscillating universes going all the way back to infinity. Of course, his metaphysics of infinitely many worlds is unverifiable and unverified by anything that could be called “scientific method.” Also, his distinction between “Nature” and “Supernature” needs considerable clarification. Where exactly do we draw the line between the two? Griffin extends the concepts of “Nature” and “natural causes” way beyond our universe to include an infinity of antecedent universes or “other worlds.” This philosophical move was not possible before Big Bang cosmology was developed and popularized much less than a century ago. Until around the middle of the twentieth century or later, all philosophers and scientists who professed to be “Naturalists” conceived of “Nature” as nothing more than *our* universe—the system of spacetime causation in which we live and move and have our being (Edwards, *What* 30–31). “Supernature” was everything not so included. We now know that *our* universe is only 13.7 billion or so years old, not everlasting and uncreated. It has not always existed, though traditional naturalists always assumed it to be eternal in some form. These “Real Naturalists” consigned all “other worlds” (like Heaven and Hell) to the domain of the Supernatural. Given “Nature” as traditional naturalists understood it, Griffin’s antecedent universes are themselves Supernatural Entities! And as causes, they are Supernatural Causes!

Griffin could respond that early in the twentieth century, even before the Big Bang theory was formulated and widely accepted, Whitehead postulated *earlier* universes with his doctrine of “cosmic epochs.” However, Whitehead referred to *other* cosmic epochs using *only* spatial words like “widest” and “beyond” (*PR* 66, 97), *never* the temporal word “before.” It could be argued that Whitehead’s view of “cosmic epochs” anticipated present-day postulates of “many worlds” coexisting with ours in infinite Superspace. (This is not real science either.) “Beyond” here did not clearly prevision the Hartshorne-Cobb-Griffin metaphysics of a beginningless

line of antecedent worlds “before” ours in a single strand of infinite Supertime.

A *theologically* combined Divine Superspacetime of infinite proportions would conceptualize how God might create distinct universes out of nothings (singularities?), but not out of the ashes of preceding universes, while *always* providing God with some universe and its creatures to love (Edwards, “How” 82–84). The words “all creation” in Whitehead’s God who “is not *before* all creation but *with* all creation” (PR 343) could be construed as referring to Divine Superspacetime, an infinite spacetime continuum, not a single strand of Supertime alone.

The most widely accepted interpretation of the Big Bang origin of our cosmic epoch postulates its emergence from an initial singularity, understood to be infinitesimally small, thus imperceptible, and utterly lawless because *all* laws of nature are there collapsed. This leaves us with no scientific way to understand or explain why or how it exploded. An infinitesimally small, imperceptible, and lawless singularity “before” the Big Bang is empirically nothing. It is not a chaos of ongoing spatialized and temporalized natural events and causes.

Does natural science either presuppose *a priori*, or infer by “scientific method,” an infinite sequence of previous universes? Given the Big Bang about 13.7 billion years ago, does empirical natural science and its methodology really take us back beyond or before that? Scientific method requires that true hypotheses be *verified*. (Regrettable, novel scientific mythologies lacking verification now abound—in the name of science.) According to Clayton, what caused or occurred “before” the Big Bang is one of many questions that “arise about the natural world which fall outside the scope of what physicists can test” (*Adventures* 240). To avoid a “God of the gaps,” must we resort to an infinitely large gap of purely hypothetical “other worlds”? Do infinitely many worlds really belong to the ideology of natural science, or is this just a prejudiced way of avoiding either theism or creation *ex nihilo*?

Consider one more quite serious difficulty for Griffin’s infinity of expanding and then contracting universes. To belong to such a series, any universe must expand indefinitely. Its rate of expansion eventually slows down and drops to zero. Then a reverse process of cosmic contraction sets in that culminates in a terminal crunch. The trouble is, *our own universe is not a representative member of any such series of expanding and then contracting and crunching universes*. Presently an exceptionally broad consensus, based on substantial evidence, concludes that we live

in either an “open” or a “flat” universe. Either will expand forever (at different rates) and never crunch. Current evidence strongly indicates that the rate of cosmic expansion of our universe is increasing and will continue to do so forever (Edwards, *What* 104–07, 129–30; Streever 73, 136; Caldwell). So why is our universe so different from infinitely many others? (I develop a sustained critique of antecedent universe oscillating cosmologies in Edwards, *What* 89–121.)

Open or flat, in a trillion years or so it all ends with a Big Freeze, not with a Big Crunch, but we do not have to worry about that if we truly comprehend that *lives now* are valuable *for their own sakes*.

5. Statistical Natural Laws

Do Griffin and Clayton really understand what it means for the laws of nature to be probabilistic and statistical? Many people do not. Both regard natural causation and the laws of the particular sciences to be very close to absolute and inviolable—either because they are metaphysically necessary or because God could not suspend them without violating God’s own nature. Real miracles would violate the inviolable. But is this really true?

Both Griffin and Clayton recognize, with Whitehead, that *the laws of nature are probabilistic and statistical* and that they merely describe or formalize the enduring habits of existing entities. Surprisingly, both come very close to absolutizing these laws. Though not “imposed” by God, they nevertheless have the status of “quasi-imposition,” says Griffin (*God Exists* 256–57).

The problem is that regarding natural laws as so absolute that they allow no individual exceptions or variations completely misunderstands their *statistical* status. In a recently published article, I explained in some detail what it means for the laws of nature to be truly statistical. To summarize, if the laws of nature are purely statistical, then:

1. Before or without the existence of any actual entities, there are no actual laws of nature, only abstract possible laws for possible worlds or “cosmic epochs,” as Whitehead would say.
2. The actual laws of nature are created by the properties, dispositions, and habits of actual entities. They do not create these habits. What God creates is a universe of habituated actualities, and from their habits we abstract their formal statistical patterns and call them “laws of nature.”

3. The laws of nature are not efficient causes of anything; they are only formal causes. They do not make anything happen or prevent anything from happening. They are the effects of such happenings, not their causes.
4. The laws of nature evolve and change as new realities emerge and the choices and habits of actual entities within the world evolve and change.
5. Statistical laws of nature do not tell us what any particular actual entity is doing or must do. They tell us only what large masses of similar entities are doing, have done, or will likely do, on average (Edwards, "God" 59–69).

I document this as Whitehead's own understanding of the statistical character of natural laws (Edwards, "God" 59–67). If correct, the absolutistic position of Griffin and Clayton on natural laws is very non-Whiteheadian. To illustrate, we will consider only the last point above.

First, statistical laws of nature tell us only what very large classes of entities are doing on average, not what any particular individual within that class is doing. Both Griffin and Clayton assume that every *specific* happening covered by a natural law is exactly like every *average* happening, and that there are no individual deviations. They assume that every individual covered by statistical laws behaves exactly the same way as all other such entities, but that is not true.

As Charles Hartshorne pointed out,

The ground laws of the world, as we seem ever likely to know them, are thus essentially statistical, in the sense that their demonstrable exactitude is due to the presence of large numbers of similar events, and not to any knowable precise causal determination of the events taken singly. An exact regularity supposed to be hidden behind these statistical laws is at best irrelevant to scientific explanation. (*LP* 167)

Hartshorne asked and answered, "Does 'predictable' mean with certainty, or with probability? If the former, then will any careful scientist accept it? If the latter, then since probability only refers to what will happen in many similar cases, the individual case remains unpredictable" (*LP* 170, 172). Even Clayton recognizes that probabilistic laws "do not determine each individual case" (*Adventures* 189), but he does not see the relevance of this to the issue of divine intervention. (Since laws are not efficient causes, laws do not *determine* anything; cases determine laws, not vice versa.)

Hartshorne did not have miracles in mind when he wrote the above words, but his comments are highly relevant to our present concerns. If the laws of nature describe only averages, not individuals, why would they not allow rare supernatural interventions in particular cases? Would rare individual case interventions really “violate” any natural laws at all? What could the word “violate” even mean for individual deviations within a formal framework of large-scale statistical averages?

This discussion does not defend the actuality of any alleged historical miracles; each must be considered on its own merits. But consider *one small aspect* of a much-discussed but very complicated example—the psycho-physical resurrection of Jesus. Griffin and Clayton explain it away, each in his own peculiar manner (the details of which are beyond the scope of this article), mainly because if real it would violate the laws of nature. But does it really? How could it if natural laws describe only extremely large numbers of happenings on average, never individual cases? (The notion of “spiritual bodies” as psycho-physical *fields* may have some relevance here, but that also is beyond the scope of this discussion. See my discussion of “Souls as Fields” in Edwards, *Axiological* 20–47.)

Assume for the sake of the argument that “All men are mortal” is a law of nature, a statistical law mind you, and that this means that when people die they stay dead. Billions of human beings have already died, and they stayed put, so this law is statistically well confirmed. If Jesus did not stay dead, how much would the statistics be affected when this one deviancy is averaged in? Hardly at all. Many very large numbers, exponents, or decimal points would be required to express such a tiny fractional deviation, so how sensible is it to call this a “violation” of anything? If all laws of nature are genuinely statistical, why would they not allow divine causation of exceedingly rare individual events? Why use so melodramatic a word as “violation”? (We get the same extremely negligible statistical results if we focus on the specific atoms, cells, organs, fields, etc., involved in a psycho-physical resurrection of Jesus.) The actuality of this resurrection in some form is not asserted or denied here, but could any purely statistical laws of nature really count against it?

The “Argument from Neglect” and the “Not-Even-Once” Principle

Even if all of their other arguments fail, Griffin and Clayton still have a close to conclusive *theological* argument against miracles. If divine interventions ever occur, then “the problem of evil becomes insurmountable,”

as Clayton expressed it (*Adventures* 107). Griffin would agree (*Panentheism* 17). As Clayton and Knapp say, this is “the strongest moral argument against most forms of theism” (*Predicament* 45). How could we not agree? This one concern has created more atheists than any other.

The problem is this. If God works a miracle even once to save someone from harm, why does not or would not a good God do so repeatedly and consistently? Obviously, God does not constantly intervene to prevent great harms, or any harms at all. Any good parent would so intervene, so why not conclude that God lacks goodness, or power, or overall mental competency, or that God just does not exist? Clayton calls this the “argument from neglect,” using Wesley Wildman’s words for it (Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament* 44).

According to Griffin, God lacks the power to suspend the laws of nature to prevent evils. Clayton’s approach is very different. God will not do it for moral reasons, he contends, even though God has the power to do it. Clayton argues that a benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God would have sound *moral* reasons for not intervening to prevent the horrible evils of the world. He calls this the “not-even-once” principle. Clayton worked out its details with Steven Knapp in their 2011 book, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*. This principle affirms, “A benevolent God could not intervene *even once* without incurring the responsibility to intervene in every case where doing so would prevent an instance of innocent suffering. Call it the *not-even-once* principle” (Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament* 49).

Clayton and Knapp explored several reasons for thinking that God’s actions (or inactions) would conform to this principle. Their own explanation is twofold. First, they offer a version of the “soul-making” principle, though they do not call it that. Second, they develop what they call the “ethical” or the “moral” reason against divine intervention. Initially, they introduce this moral reason as a question, “Would it in fact be *unethical*, because unfair, for God to intervene only in certain cases but not in all?” (Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament* 50). Here are their two reasons for the “not-even-once” principle:

[W]hy can’t God at least *sometimes* override the regularities of nature when doing so is needed to prevent innocent suffering? We have answered this question in two ways: first, by showing why the development of rational and autonomous agents requires a greater degree of regularity than might initially be obvious, and second, by arguing that occasional divine abrogations of natural law, even if

metaphysically possible, turn out to be morally inconsistent with the capacities of a divine agent—not because breaking natural laws is inherently immoral, but because by doing so God would incur a responsibility to intervene in most or all cases of suffering. But this would make it impossible for God to limit the frequency of such interventions and therefore to preserve a universe in which beings like ours could evolve. (Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament* 52)

As I see it, their second “ethical” consideration is basically an argument from justice or fairness. If God were to intervene even once and only once to avert evil without doing so for everyone else in peril, God would be grossly unjust or unfair to everyone else. To be just or fair, if God helps anyone, God would then have a moral duty to help absolutely everyone in danger. God could not then “limit the frequency of such interventions.”

Suppose, for example, that some man is the sole survivor of terrible accident, e.g., the crash of an airplane carrying one hundred people, and he thinks God worked a special miracle just to save him. This somewhat commonplace way of thinking generates terrible theodicy problems. It implies that God was horrifically unjust or unfair to the remaining ninety-nine people God allowed to die. Any omnipotent God who would work a special miracle to save only one, but not ninety-nine additional miracles to save everyone else, would be unthinkable unjust, grossly immoral, a Devil in disguise! A morally just God who saves one would be morally obligated to save all. A morally just God must choose between a “no-not-once” universe and a “yes-every-time” universe.

A morally good God would have very good reasons for not creating a world in which she *always* intervenes to save everyone from every peril. In a “yes-every-time” universe, no one would ever bother to do anything for themselves or for anyone else because God would do everything for everyone. God would always solve all problems. In a “yes-every-time” universe with no risks or multiple options, no one could be free, originative, creative, self-developing. No one could make real choices between doing right and doing wrong lest they get it wrong. No one would ever become responsible practical, moral, or spiritual agents, what Clayton and Knapp call “rational and autonomous” agents. No one would have any practical, moral, or spiritual duties, or engage effortfully in any such activities. No one would ever grow in such ways. (Thus, no soul-making.) In that world, divine interventions, what we call “miracles,” would actually be the laws or established regularities of nature. Our irregularities would be that world’s regularities. There would be no adventure, no surprises, and no place for

loving compassion—for suffering in love with those who suffer. How God could arrange the specific details of a complex social world where the well-being of one never conflicts with that of another is probably beyond our comprehension, perhaps even beyond God's. The price for such a world would be too high, all of these trade-offs too unacceptable. Of course, about this there is always room for honest disagreement.

Elements of a Viable Process Theodicy

I previously published my own version of viable process theodicy as an alternative to Griffin's (Edwards, *What* 299–310). My own philosophical and theological "sentiments" are much closer to Clayton's than to Griffin's, including creation *ex nihilo* (Edwards, "How" 77–96). In my view, no single "magic bullet" solves the problem of evil. A plausible account of how the horrible evils of the world can be reconciled with the reality of a truly worshipful, moral, and powerful God must be very complex. Many factors must work together. No one consideration "solves" the problem of evil all by itself. All of the following taken collectively might. The seven elements outlined next are like strands in a rope, no one of which is strong enough all by itself to "solve" the "problem of evil." Each is essential. No one of them can be ignored. Only collectively can they be expected to succeed. In my 2001 book titled *What Caused the Big Bang?*, I explained, as below, the first six mutually complementary elements of a plausible process theodicy. I now add a seventh—thanks to Clayton and Knapp. More than seven may be required, but this may be a good start.

1. The *free-will defense*. God's necessary goodness limits the divine's own power and bestows degrees of creativity, self-determination, "free will," and responsibility on individuals throughout all creation, not just to human beings. Many worldly evils result from human abuse of this gift, but human corruption does not explain natural evils. Much natural evil results unintentionally and collectively from uncountable and uncoordinated individual creative decisions made throughout the depths of nature. Any universe where degrees of self-determination or creativity go "all the way down" would inevitably be somewhat wild, unpredictable, out of control, and unmanageable, even to God.

2. The *soul-making defense*. Some evils are inevitable because it would be impossible for human beings to have, develop, or exercise any practical, moral, or spiritual virtues or traits of character in a universe lacking all perils. Soul-making is heavily emphasized by John Hick (and by Clayton and Knapp without using exactly these words for it). Soul-making solves

some problems of theodicy, but not all. It does not account for horrendous moral and natural evils so greatly out of proportion to their beneficial results. It does not explain the massive moral and natural evils that totally wipe people out, allowing them no future to develop their souls and bring goodness out of evil. But it does explain something. It is a viable part of a solution.

3. The great *utility of law and order*. Being able to predict and control much of the future is highly desirable, even in a world lacking in absolute predictability and determinism. We can plan for and act toward the future only because reliable natural laws enable us to foresee both desirable and undesirable consequences and then choose and act accordingly. The laws of nature, (more accurately, habituated actual entities) sometimes work against us, but most of the time what we call the laws of nature work for us, especially when we work intelligently with them.

4. The *inevitable conflict of good with good*. In any rich and complicated universe, one individual's interests and well-being will inevitably conflict with those of others. This theme was heavily emphasized by Charles Hartshorne (CS 311). Griffin and Clayton and Knapp may acknowledge this somewhere, but it probably deserves more attention. God's real options seem to be between creating a very rich and complicated pluralistic universe in which the interests and well-being of some inevitably come into conflict with those of others, or else an exceedingly simple universe with very few individuals, all far removed from one another, if that makes any sense at all.

Humans are not the only ones who count or come into conflict. All nonhuman animals, plants, cells, and so forth, in a panexperiential universe matter greatly to God, to themselves, and to one another. Complex earth-life evolved and existed long before our *Homo sapiens* species. Those millions of years were not a waste of God's time. God loved the dinosaurs, too! And all the rest. With an infinite amount of time available, God does not have to rush to get anything done. Prehuman lives also came into conflict, but God was there rejoicing with all who rejoiced and suffering with all who suffered. God got it all down and still has it.

5. *Consolation*. We derive great consolation from the presence of God and of compassionate people who understand what we endure and suffer with us in our sufferings and losses. Whitehead's God, our "great companion—the fellow sufferer who understands" (PR 351), is an essential part of a comprehensive process theodicy. All evils inflicted on us and that we inflict on others are ultimately inflicted on God, who responds with real

compassion. Process theology's compassionate God, our fellow-sufferer, gives us great consolation—but not St. Anselm's impassible God who *appears* to be compassionate but *really is not*. If God really bears all our sorrows and griefs, there is deep comfort, consolation, and healing in that insight.

6. *Compensation after death*. Many religious people believe that after death God will compensate us (and the animals according to John Wesley [Edwards, *John Wesley's* 76–77]), for all the unjust sufferings and losses we (and the animals) experience here and now. Survival after death is an open question. Evidence for it is inconclusive, though not totally lacking. Even so, the idea of *compensation hereafter* should be taken more seriously than did Dostoyevsky's Alyosha Karamazov. Alyosha did not take *all seven* elements of this viable process theodicy into account. He focused on and rejected this one, compensation, but no single element stands *or falls* alone. If real, compensation would be another legitimate part of a comprehensive process solution to problems of theodicy.

7. To these six, after studying the Clayton-Knapp “no-not-once” principle, I must add a seventh consideration, one that I missed earlier—*God's moral justice or fairness to all*. We often think that God is unjust or unfair because God does not work miracles to save particular individuals from all ills. But just the reverse is true! God does *not ever intervene* to deliver anyone from harm's way precisely *because God is just or fair to all*. The Clayton and Knapp “no-not-once” principle makes this perfectly clear. God could not justly intervene to deliver anyone from harm without delivering most—which would completely undercut most of the preceding positive goods. The price would be too high. The Clayton and Knapp “no-not-once” principle is a very significant contribution to process theodicy. It would be to anyone's theodicy.

One complication for the “no-not-once” principle is worth considering. Yes, without gross injustice, God could not intervene *to save* even one from harm without saving all, but what if God intervenes occasionally *for other purposes*, for example, *to reveal* the divine nature in some special way to human beings (Thomsen, “Non-Reductive Physicalism,” 115–16). If God occasionally interrupts natural regularities for reasons of self-disclosure, would that imply that God must work miracles for the entirely different purpose of delivering everyone from all ills? Would it imply that God could not reveal the divine nature miraculously to some without doing so to all? I leave these as open questions for further discussion.

On what grounds do we finally decide what God is like, what God's perfect-making attributes are? Griffin (*Evil* 10–11 and ch. 11) and Clayton (*Adventures* 101) agree that they seek a carefully considered understanding of what God is like that articulates and does not conflict with God's *worshipfulness*. We theists do search for a concept of a God who would indeed be worthy of our complete devotion with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths. We try our best to flesh out *the details* of St. Anselm's notion of "that being than whom none greater (better) can be conceived" (though not exactly in Anselm's way). Griffin and Clayton and Knapp do this with great integrity and sincerity, but in conflicting ways. Perhaps all rationally competent authorities are not ultimately destined to agree! Here we may and do honestly disagree. Some very thoughtful people may even be so unconvinced by theodicy at its best that they end up as atheists. Perhaps most will not go that route.

Clayton and Knapp and I, but not Griffin, would judge that a supremely worshipful God, a truly good God, would have sufficient power or efficiently causal energy to do magnificent things like create universes out of nothing; that such a God would not be limited by some independent external metaphysical force like creativity; and that such a God would generously and lovingly self-limit the divine power and give some of it away to the creatures. We agree that on *moral* grounds alone, a truly worshipful God would gladly create an orderly but risky soul-making universe in which responsible creatures can originate their own decisions and grow practically, socially, mentally, morally, and spiritually. We also agree that a truly just God would deliberately not save a few from all evils without saving everyone, and that a "yes-every-time" world in which God alone solves everyone's problems would not be worth creating or inhabiting. Any other god "would not be God."

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