

The Problem of Suffering: The Exemplarist Theodicy

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Abstract

This article aims to provide a response to the problem of suffering through an explication of a new theodicy termed the Exemplarist Theodicy. This specific theodicy will be formulated in light of the moral theory provided by Linda Zagzebski, termed the Exemplarist Moral Theory, the notion of transformative experience, as explicated by L.A. Paul, Havi Carel and Ian James Kidd, and the virtue-theoretic approach to suffering proposed by Michael Brady, which, in combination with some further precisifying philosophical concepts—namely, compensation, total empathy, and infinitely valuable connections—will provide us with a possible, morally sufficient reason for why God allows individuals to experience suffering.

Keywords

Suffering, theodicy, exemplarism, transformative experience, virtue

Introduction

According to Alasdair MacIntyre,¹ it is an evident fact of life that individuals—namely, humans and other sentient animals—regularly suffer in such a manner that they are vulnerable to many different kinds of afflictions such as ‘bodily illness and injury, inadequate nutrition, mental defect and disturbance, and human aggression and neglect’. As embodied entities, humans and animals are subject to various forms of suffering, which can occur at a physical and mental level through injury, illness, and the ageing of their bodies and minds.² Or, specifically for humans, it can occur at a social level

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), p. 1.
2. The terms ‘individual’ and ‘sentient creature’ will be used throughout to refer to both humans and animals—unless the context indicates differently.

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through exploitation and oppression that happens within the communities that humans form.³ From a more general point of view, suffering, as Michael Brady notes,⁴ can best be defined as an experience that has the following features:

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- (1) (Suffering) A subject suffers when and only when she has:
- (i) An unpleasant experience, consisting of a sensation *S* and a desire that *S* not be occurring.
 - (ii) An occurrent desire that this unpleasant experience not be occurring.
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According to this specific account of suffering—which has been termed the *Desire Account*—an experience of suffering is made up of the occurrence of a particular sensation of some kind—which need not be limited to pain—and a specific desire that this sensation not occur. In short, an experience of suffering thus includes a sensation plus a certain desire. Hence, an individual is physically suffering if there is a certain discomfort in their body that is painful enough that they desire that this sensation should stop. Or, an individual is mentally suffering if there is a certain emotional state that is distracting enough that they desire that this sensation should cease as well. These experiences of suffering—of the physical and mental kind—are, as Havi Carel and Ian James Kidd note,⁵ fundamental features of sentient life that express our ‘contingency, vulnerability, and subjection’. They are not episodic features of the lives of certain unfortunate humans and animals, but universal features of sentient life. The reality of life is such that individuals constantly face the possibility of being subjected to suffering experiences—that is, these undesirable experiences are not selected by them—and thus, human agency is such that our lives are deeply conditioned by sets of circumstances that lead to only a few of us, if any at all, being free from suffering. Thus, as Eleonore Stump writes,⁶ ‘Only the most naive or tendentious among us would deny the extent and intensity of suffering in the world’. Hence, one can now ask the important question, with Stump, of whether an individual can indeed hold ‘consistently with the common view of suffering in the world, that there is an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good

3. The social aspect of suffering though of great importance, will not be the focus of this article—rather, the experiences of suffering that will be of focus will solely be that of the physical and mental suffering of humans and animals.

4. Michael Brady, *Suffering and Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 55.

5. Havi Carel and Ian James Kidd, ‘Expanding Transformative Experience’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 28.1 (2020), pp. 1–15 (3).

6. Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3. I focus in this article on the issue of the problem of suffering rather than the more common issue of the problem of evil—as I believe that the former, in a similar manner to Stump, *Wandering*, p. 4, is the more ‘salient thing’. However, unlike Stump and others, I do not draw a distinction here between moral suffering (suffering that is the result of deliberate human action) and natural suffering (suffering that is the result of natural processes or accident), as the theodicy that is being formulated in this article applies equally to both forms of suffering, and thus one does not have to provide different responses to these two forms of suffering.

God?”⁷ An individual who understands these ‘MacIntyrean facts of life’ *and* also affirms the existence of God—conceived of as an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being that is providentially in control of the world—is faced with the question of why God would allow sentient creatures to undergo these experiences? That is, why does God allow individuals to suffer? Now, an individual who seeks an answer to this question is looking for what has been termed a *theodicy*—a possible, morally sufficient reason for why God would allow individuals to suffer—in short, they are looking for a possible justification for God, in light of the problem of suffering.⁸ In recent thought, a number of natural theologians—who are individuals who seek to put forward reasons to believe in God on the basis of various phenomena of the natural world—have favoured a *greater good* response to this question.⁹ A greater good response conceives of God as a being who allows humans to suffer *for the sake of a greater good*—where the permissibility of God doing so is dependent upon the following conditions being in place:¹⁰

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- (2) (Greater Good) A good state of affairs is a greater good, if and only if:
- (i) Allowing an individual to suffer is the only morally permissible way in which God can make possible the occurrence of the good state of affairs.
 - (ii) The expected value of allowing the experience of suffering, given the good state of affairs, is positive.
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7. Stump, *Wandering*, p. 3. This question expresses in a looser form what has come to be termed the ‘logical problem of evil’, which is founded in its most rigorous form in the work of J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). This article does not seek to provide a rebutting objection to this argument—rather, the main focus of this article is to introduce a new theodicy, with the job of applying it to the argument being left for future work. A similar extension of the proposed theodicy can, and will, be made to the ‘new’ version of the logical problem of evil found in James P. Sterba, *Is a Good God Logically Possible?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). Moreover, as I follow Trent Dougherty, ‘Recent Work on the Problem of Evil’, *Analysis* 71.3 (2011), p. 560, in taking it to be the case that ‘It is questionable whether there is any substantive difference between the so-called “logical” problem of evil and the “evidential” problem of evil’, the response that is given to the ‘logical problem of evil’ by the theodicy that is presented in this article is also applicable to that of the ‘evidential problem of evil’ as well.
 8. I include the term ‘possible’ in the definition of a theodicy to emphasize the fact that I follow Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), rather than Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 192, in taking a theodicy to be a *possible* reason rather than the *actual* reason for why God allows individuals to suffer.
 9. Three of the most influential proponents of this approach are John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Swinburne, *Providence*, and Stump, *Wandering*.
 10. These two conditions are derived in part from Swinburne, *Providence*, p. 19. However, the main distinction made here is that of it not including two further conditions of allowing an experience of suffering to occur is something that God has the right to do, and God does all else that he can to bring about the good state of affairs.

Hence, the greater good that provides a possible, morally sufficient reason for God allowing suffering to occur must be such that, first, it is the only (morally permissible) way in which God can bring about that good state by him bringing about first (or simultaneously) some experience of suffering—or by him allowing such suffering to occur. And second, it must be such that if God intentionally brings about an experience of suffering for the sake of a good state of affairs, the good state of affairs must be (at least a bit) more of a good state than the experience of suffering is a bad state. And likewise, if God allows the suffering to occur, but he is not the direct cause of it coming about (e.g., the direct cause of it being that of another agent or by a chance occurrence), then the more probable it is in these circumstances that the suffering will occur, and the closer the experience of suffering must be to being a less bad state than the good state is good.¹¹ In other words, the good that is the result of an action must overall have a positive expected value. Now, given the above conditions for a greater good captured by (2), what is the good state(s) that is brought about by God allowing individuals to experience suffering? I believe that the greater good sought is that of experiences of suffering providing the best means for humans to transform into exemplars—such that a given human experience of an instance of suffering is the only morally sufficient way in which they can transform into an exemplar. However, as will be detailed later on, this specific explanation of why God allows individuals to suffer will be shown to provide a justification for only a certain class of individuals, and thus, a further precisification of the theodicy will need to be made, in order for God to be justified in allowing *all* individuals to suffer. The focus of the rest of this article will thus be on further fleshing out this brief answer by explicating the moral framework in which the notion of an exemplar is situated within—that of the Exemplarist Moral Theory provided by Linda Zagzebski—and the notion of transformative experience, as explicated in different contexts by L.A. Paul, Havi Carel and Ian James Kidd, and the virtue-theoretic approach to suffering provided by Michael Brady—which, both in combination with the former framework, will form a potentially successful theodicy—termed the Exemplarist Theodicy—and thus we will have a possible, morally sufficient reason for why God allows individuals to experience suffering.¹² It will be noted, however, that though the Exemplarist Theodicy, as it stands, is successful in providing an explanation for why God allows *humans* (and a certain range of them—namely, mentally fully functional human adults and *some* mentally fully functional human children) to suffer—it does not provide an explanation for why God allows other sentient creatures (such as animals, most children, and non-mentally fully functional human adults) to suffer. Hence, their suffering appears to be gratuitous. Thus, a further precisification will need to be made to the theodicy that will utilize the notion of compensation provided

11. Swinburne, *Providence*.

12. Though one can take the theodicy formulated here to be a new theodicy, some of the central moves that are made by it to provide a justification for God allowing suffering—namely, the development of certain virtues—enable it to be properly categorized as a ‘soul making’ theodicy in the mould of John Hick’s influential account—with certain elements of the theodicy being drawn (in a modified form) from Richard Swinburne’s greater-good theodicy as well.

by Marilyn McCord Adams, the concept of an ‘infinitely valuable connection’ that has been proposed by Robin Collins, and the notion of total empathy introduced by Zagzebski—which, in all, will allow the Exemplarist Theodicy to be one that justifies the suffering of *all* individuals.¹³

Thus, the plan is as follows: in the following section (‘Exemplarism and Transformative Experience’), I explicate the central elements of the Exemplarist Moral Theory as proposed by Linda Zagzebski and the notion of a transformative experience as provided by L.A. Paul (as extended by Havi Carel and Ian James Kidd). Then, in the subsequent section (‘Transforming into an Exemplar’), I further explicate the notion of transformative suffering that has been provided by Carel and Kidd, in combination with the virtue-theoretic approach of Michael Brady, and link this back to the framework detailed in the previous section, which will provide the basis of the Exemplarist Theodicy and a morally sufficient reason for why God allows individuals to experience suffering. Subsequent to this, in the section ‘Compensated Suffering’, I detail two important objections that can be raised against the theodicy and seek to, in light of one of the objections, further precisify the Exemplarist Theodicy by further drawing on the work of Zagzebski, in combination with that of Marilyn McCord Adams and Robin Collins—which will provide a means for the Exemplarist Theodicy to provide a justification for why God allows *all* individuals to suffer. Finally, there will be a concluding section (‘Conclusion’), which will summarize the above results and conclude the article.¹⁴

Exemplarism and Transformative Experience

Exemplarism is a moral theory that is foundational in structure—in that it has a single point of origin. However, unlike other moral theories, Exemplarism’s foundation is not conceptual; rather, the construction of the theory is centred on direct reference to

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13. Many individuals have found it insensitive to construct a theodicy, as will be done in this article. However, I ask the reader to not view myself and other individuals in the field of contemporary philosophy of religion that have sought to provide one as insensitive to the experiential reality and difficulty of suffering. Rather, what must be understood is that there is indeed a problem why God, if he exists, allows individuals to suffer, and if a theist is to be rational in their belief in the existence of God, some type of explanation will need to be provided. Hence, in a similar manner to Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?*, rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 85, I ask the reader to view the theodicy formulated here (and other similar ones) from the perspective of standing back from one’s own particular experiential situation and asking the very general question of what particular goods might God seek to provide individuals by allowing them to experience suffering. The focus here is thus on providing a solution to a theoretical problem—the compatibility of God, the goods he provides, and the reality of suffering—rather than that of the experiential problem that can only be responded to with deep sorrow, empathy and comfort.
 14. It is important to note that there are indeed criticisms that can be raised against the philosophical positions utilized in developing this theodicy—however, as detailing and dealing with these criticisms will take us too far afield, we can assume a conditional position of: *if* the exemplarist moral theory and the notion of transformative experiences are cogent, then there is a successful theodicy that can be provided for suffering experiences.

exemplars of moral goodness, that are picked out by the emotion of (reflective) admiration. We can construe the theory of Exemplarism succinctly as follows:

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- (3) Exemplarism is a foundational moral theory that:
 (Exemplarism) (i) Grounds the meaning of the central concepts of our moral practice in exemplars of goodness, who are conceived of as individuals that are most admirable.
 (ii) Exemplars of goodness are directly referred to and are identified through the operation of the emotion of (reflective) admiration.
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The starting point in Zagzebski's construction of the theory of Exemplarism is the semantics of moral terms that are modelled on the theory of direct reference for natural kind terms introduced by Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke.¹⁵ Prior to the work of Putnam and Kripke, the dominant theory of meaning was the descriptivist theory. According to the descriptivist theory, the meaning of a specific term is the description that it has in the mind of an individual. For example, the term 'nail' means something like 'a small metal spike with a broadened flat head, driven into wood to join things together or to serve as a hook'. This is the dictionary definition of this term, and a descriptivist theory might be plausible for a term such as 'nail', but it is not plausible for other referral terms such as proper names and natural kind terms like 'water' or 'gold'. For example, as Zagzebski notes:

water cannot be 'colorless, odorless liquid in the lakes and streams and falling from the sky', or any other description that we use in ordinary discourse to pick out water. That is because we can imagine that something other than water looked like water and fell from the sky and ran in the streams.¹⁶

The theory of direct reference explains this important feature of 'water' and other natural kind terms.¹⁷ Hence, the positive proposal provided by the theory of direct reference is that a natural kind term like 'water' or 'gold' refers to whatever entity is the same kind of entity as some indexically identified instance.¹⁸ Hence, gold is whatever is the same element as *that*, and water is whatever is the same liquid as *that*, wherein each of these instances, the demonstrative term 'that' refers directly to an entity—which is expressed in its simplest form by pointing.¹⁹ The primary benefit of adopting this account of reference is that individuals are often in situations in which they do not possess knowledge about the nature of the

15. Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of Meaning', *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 7 (1975), pp. 131–93; Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

16. Linda Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 11.

17. Furthermore, according to Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, p. 11, we can succeed in referring to water even if we associate the wrong descriptions with 'water', as what makes water 'water' is that it is H₂O. But the meaning of 'water' *cannot* be 'H₂O' since people did not even have the concept of H₂O, much less use it in explaining the meaning of 'water', until recent centuries.

18. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

19. Linda Zagzebski, 'Exemplarist Virtue Theory', *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010), pp. 41–57 [hereafter cited as Zagzebski, 'Virtue'].

referent, yet are still able to formulate a definition that matches with the referent's nature. For example, for a very long period of time, individuals did not have knowledge of water's (chemical) structure—yet this did not prevent people from defining 'water' in a way that fixed the reference of the term and continued to do so after the chemical structure of water (i.e., H₂O) was discovered.²⁰ Hence, the theory of direct reference provides an explanation for how the term 'water' referred to the same thing before and after the discovery of the chemical structure of water. Furthermore, the theory of direct reference also provides a way for one to understand how the competent speakers of a given language can use certain terms to successfully refer to things without having a descriptive meaning of it at hand. For example, as Zagzebski notes,²¹ if one were to compare a term like 'hammer', one can see that when someone says 'hammer', they are referring to 'whatever satisfies a description given in advance. Presumably, you cannot talk about hammers unless you grasp that description.' However, this does not need to be the case for natural kind terms like 'water' and 'gold', where speakers do not need to associate descriptions with these terms in order to successfully refer to the right kinds. Rather, one can successfully refer to these natural kinds even in a situation where one associates the wrong descriptions with the terms like 'water' and 'gold'.²² Moreover, it is not even required for the speaker to be able to identify these natural kinds reliably themselves so long as some speakers in the community—the experts—are able to do so, with the other individuals relying upon their judgement.²³

The primary semantical point that is derived from the theory of direct reference is that of the term 'good person' not referring through a descriptive meaning—that is, a person fulfilling a certain description. Rather, one should conceive of the term 'good person' as referring to persons like *that*—be it individuals such as Mother Teresa, Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, Socrates and so on. That is, at a more specific level, the basic moral concepts are anchored in particular exemplars of moral goodness—direct reference to these exemplars is taken to be foundational in the proposed theory and stated as follows: good persons are persons like *that*—where, again, as in the case of natural kinds, the demonstrative term 'that' refers directly to an entity. By picking out exemplars in this specific way, one can fix the reference of the term 'good person' without having to use descriptive concepts.²⁴ In other words, it is not required for ordinary individuals to know the nature of good persons—that is, what makes them good, rather than not. As Zagzebski noted, it is not required for any individual to know 'what makes a good person good in order to successfully refer to good persons, any more than it was necessary that anybody knew what makes water "water" to successfully refer to water before the advent of molecular theory'.²⁵ In Exemplarism, one is not required

20. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

21. Linda Zagzebski, 'Exemplarism and Admiration', in Christian B. Miller, R. Michael Furr, Angela Knobel, and William Fleeson (eds.), *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 264. [hereafter cited as Zagzebski, 'Exemplarism'].

22. Zagzebski, 'Virtue'.

23. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

24. Zagzebski, 'Exemplarism', p. 264.

25. Linda Zagzebski, 'Moral Exemplars in Theory and Practice', *Theory and Research in Education* 11.2 (2013), p. 199.

to associate any descriptive meaning with the term ‘good person’—with users of a given language group being able to successfully refer to good persons even in situations where members of this group associate the wrong descriptions with the term ‘good person’.²⁶

Moreover, as in the case of natural kinds, one can successfully refer to good persons so long as they, or certain other individuals in the community, can pick out exemplars—which is already present within our moral practice by investigation of personal experience and narratives.²⁷ Hence, important moral concepts such as a virtue, right and wrong acts, and good states of affairs can be defined by reference to, and after an investigation of, these exemplary people who are certain individuals that are admirable and worth emulating.²⁸ More fully, for Exemplarism, one is required to focus on the *most admirable people*—who could be fictional persons, non-fictional persons who are living or dead, or persons who are a mix of both. Exemplars are thus those individuals that are most admirable—where one identifies admirable persons by the emotion of admiration, which is subject, as Zagzebski writes, ‘to education through the example of the emotional reactions of other persons’.²⁹ Exemplarism is thus compatible with the view that one’s identification of a set of exemplars are revisable as more knowledge of them becomes available (or one becomes aware of further information concerning them)—which could lead to one losing one’s admiration for them. Hence, in a similar manner in which an individual can be mistaken that a certain body of water is really water (i.e., H₂O)—one can also be mistaken that a certain person who is paradigmatically good is really good (i.e., most admirable). However, in Zagzebski’s thought,³⁰ it is unlikely that one would be mistaken in the identification of most exemplars—in a similar manner to how one cannot be mistaken that most of what they take to be water is really water—as there is a specific referential connection between good persons and the individuals that are identified as good—namely, good persons are persons like *that*. Nevertheless, at least at the initial stage, one is not required to admire the set of exemplars in *every respect*. Rather, these exemplars are conceived of as being the standard for one’s moral theorizing—in that they systematically link together all of one’s moral concepts.

Three categories of exemplars, according to Zagzebski,³¹ present themselves: first, the category of heroes—which would include individuals such as Leopold Socha, a man who saved ten Jews during World War II. Second, the category of saints—which would include individuals such as Giuseppe Moscati, a doctor who showed great charity and compassion towards the poor. Third, the category of sages—which would include individuals such as Confucius, who was renowned in sixth-century China for his wisdom. Plausibly all three categories of exemplars exemplify virtues, and one would seek to refer to all of them to ascertain information about what constitutes a different type of admirable life. However, each of these categories of exemplars is also taken to have a *particular* virtue that is associated with it—namely, courage in the case of the category

26. Zagzebski, ‘Exemplarism’.

27. Linda Zagzebski, ‘Divine Motivation Theory and Exemplarism’, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8.3 (2016), pp. 109–21. [hereafter cited as Zagzebski, ‘Motivation’].

28. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

29. Zagzebski, ‘Virtue’, pp. 51–52.

30. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

31. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, pp. 60–128.

of heroes, charity in the case of the category of saints, and wisdom in the case of the category of sages. Furthermore, certain moral terms are defined by reference to one category of exemplar rather than another. For instance, as Zagzebski notes, the ‘concept of a “right act” is most plausibly defined by reference to wise persons rather than, say, heroes. But wise persons, or sages, may reveal little about the variety of virtues and the scope of virtuous ends.’³² Nevertheless, at a general level, in identifying a set of exemplars that play a role in grounding our moral framework, one is brought into contact with these exemplars, through the emotion of (reflective) admiration. One identifies an admirable person by the emotion of (reflective) admiration, which is taken, in Zagzebski’s thought,³³ to be a generally trustworthy emotion—though it may not always be trusted. That is, one can trust their admiration of other persons if it survives conscientious reflection over time. Conscientious reflection, in Zagzebski’s thought, is ‘reflection on our total set of beliefs, emotions, and other psychic states when we are using them the best we can to make them fit their objects’.³⁴ The justification for trusting admiration, by it surviving conscientious reflection, does not mean that one must reflect upon this state every time that they are in it—rather, it solely means that reflection upon one’s psychic state with the aim of making it fit with its intentional object is the test for the justification of admiration *when needed*.³⁵ Thus, when the admiration of a given individual does survive conscientious reflection, one takes the object of admiration to be admirable—with this object being the foundation of our moral framework and most imitable in the respect in which it is admirable. Admiration is thus central to Exemplarism and can be conceived of as an emotion. As an emotion, admiration has an affective component—that is, it has a certain characteristic ‘feel’ when experienced. Thus, among the emotions experienced by an individual, it feels different for one to admire someone from what it feels for one to experience the emotion of love, fear, or anger towards someone. And, given the affective aspect of an emotion, emotions are potentially motivating, in that an emotion moves an individual to respond to a situation by performing an action that expresses that emotion overtly. So, admiration—in a similar manner to other emotions—moves an individual in a certain manner. That is, a person who is admirable in some respect is imitable in that specific respect, and thus this emotion leads one to want to emulate the individual that is admired; as Zagzebski notes, ‘the feeling of admiration is a kind of attraction that carries with it the impetus to imitate’.³⁶ The attractiveness—rather than the repulsiveness or evaluative neutrality—of an admirable individual thus provides an urge for one to imitate or emulate the intentional object— if and when emulation is indeed possible.³⁷

Now, an important distinction can be drawn between two different types of admiration: admiration for natural talents (or virtues) and admiration for acquired talents

32. Zagzebski, ‘Motivation’, p. 116.

33. Zagzebski, ‘Virtue’, p. 54.

34. Zagzebski, ‘Exemplarism’, p. 250.

35. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

36. Zagzebski, ‘Virtue’, p. 54.

37. Zagzebski, ‘Exemplarism’.

(or virtues)—with the latter being the type of admiration that is relevant to Exemplarism. More precisely, an individual is admired for them possessing some trait of excellence that we admire—be it an intellectual or moral virtue. But the emotion that is directed toward natural talents, according to Zagzebski, ‘feels different from the emotion directed toward acquired excellences’.³⁸ For example, admiring the natural intelligence of an individual plausibly feels different from admiring the generosity, kindness, or courage of that individual. Additionally, there is also a difference to be had here in the manner in which the two types of human excellence can be emulated—namely, the fact that one can emulate an acquired excellence (for example, one can emulate the courage of Leopold Socha or the kindness of Mother Teresa) but a natural excellence cannot be emulated (for example, one cannot emulate the artistic genius of Leonardo di Vinci or the musical genius of Beethoven). Thus, as Zagzebski writes, we admire, in the manner relevant to Exemplarism, the person who performs ‘admirable acts when we believe that the source of the act is something internal to the person’s psychology, and it is acquired rather than inborn’.³⁹ Hence, in light of all of this, admiration for natural excellences and admiration for acquired excellences—which are deep features of an individual’s psychology—are two distinct types of admiration—with the latter being the type of admiration that plays a role in the exemplarist framework. Thus, admirability of an individual can provide motivation for one to, first, make one’s life conformable to the admirable and, second, provide a means for one to understand the central moral concepts of our moral practice. More specifically, Zagzebski sees that one can proceed to systematically define a series of moral concepts by reference to a given set of exemplary persons,⁴⁰ as illustrated by Figure 1, and which can be stated more precisely as follows:

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| (4) (Moral Concepts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) A <i>virtue</i> is a trait we admire in an exemplar. It is what makes that person admirable in a certain respect. (ii) A <i>good motive</i> is a motive of an exemplar. It is a motive of a person like that. (iii) A <i>good end</i> is a state of affairs at which exemplars aim. It is a state of affairs at which persons like that aim. (iv) A <i>virtuous act</i> is an admirable act, an act we admire in a person like that. (v) An <i>admirable life</i> is a life lived by an exemplar, a person like that. (vi) A <i>desirable life</i> (a life of well-being) is a life desired by an exemplar. The components of a good life are good for a human person. (vii) A <i>right act</i> for a person A in some set of circumstances C is what the admirable person would take to be most favoured by the balance of reasons for persons like A in C. (viii) A <i>duty</i> in some set of circumstances C is an act an admirable person demands from both herself and others. She would feel guilty if she did not do it, and she would blame others if they do not do it. |
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38. Zagzebski, ‘Exemplarism’, p. 255.

39. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, p. 64.

40. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, p. 21.

These specific definitions are not intended to give the content of the series of moral concepts that play an important role in our moral practice—neither are they intended to reveal the deep nature of these moral concepts—as they do not tell us *what* virtue, right act, or a good life, *is*; rather, they simply provide one with directions for finding out.⁴¹ That is, as Zagzebski notes, in each case noted above, ‘the concept to be defined (virtue, good state of affairs, right act, and so on) is defined via indexical reference to a paradigmatically good person’.⁴² So a virtue is a trait we admire in that person and in persons like *that*. A good end is a state of affairs at which persons like *that* aim. A good life is a life desired by persons like *that*. A right act is an act a person like *that* would take to be favoured by the balance of reasons. And a duty is what persons like *that* would demand of themselves and others.⁴³ In short, one can thus say that exemplars play a fundamental role in ‘grounding morality’. This can be captured through the illustration featured in Figure 1.⁴⁴

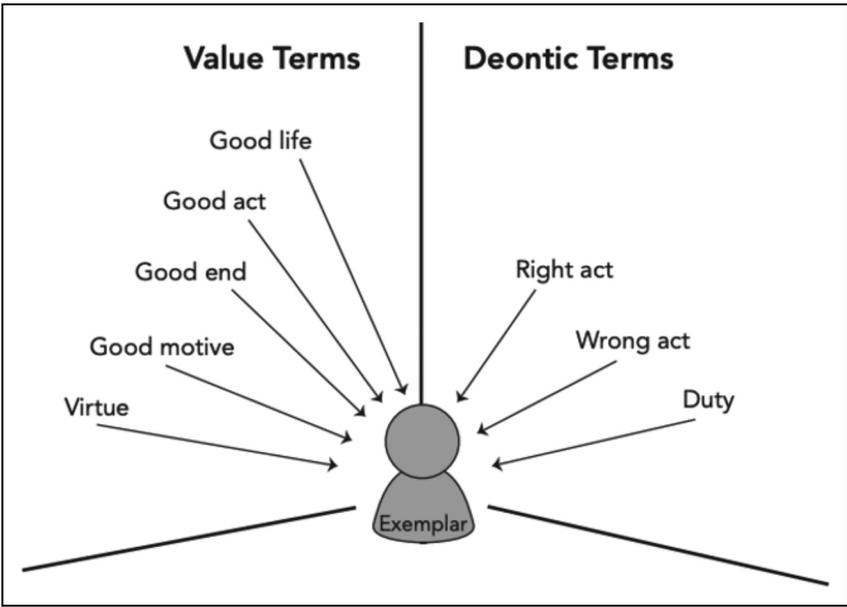


Figure 1. Structure of Moral Framework.

Hence, the primary purpose of these definitions is to enable one to identify the reference of the moral terms in such a way as to provide a basis to find out *what* to investigate in order for one to acquire a deeper understanding of these concepts. And, as the central concepts of our moral practice are rooted in persons, narratives and descriptions of these persons can be revealing—that is, they can reveal what exactly makes a particular exemplar a paradigmatically good

41. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.
42. Zagzebski, ‘Virtue’, p. 55.
43. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, p. 22.
44. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, p. 22.

person—which, plausibly, would be their *psychological structure*. Thus, by an individual undertaking careful observation of a given exemplar, one can discover what the psychological structure of a person is (i.e., what makes them into an exemplar)—with these features being the *deep* features of their psychological structure. One is thus, as Zagzebski notes, ‘attempting to identify acquired psychological features of the person that are the sources of acts we admire’.⁴⁵ And, as Zagzebski further writes, ‘the degree of admirability of the person who performs the acts is greater when the acts arise from deep features of the person’s psychology’.⁴⁶ Hence, these features of an individual’s psychological structure are *acquired* and—being ‘deep’—can be best understood as an *enduring trait of character* or, more precisely, a *virtue*. One thus can identify virtues as the psychological sources of an exemplar’s admirable actions—in that these actions arise from these specific sources. In short, admirable acts are thus actions that express an exemplar’s character and the deep traits or virtues associated with it.⁴⁷

Importantly, however, though all moral concepts are grounded on exemplars, this does not mean that the theory posited by Exemplarism is entirely subjectivist.⁴⁸ Rather, there is a type of modest moral realism that is *grounded in the real, natural world—that is, it is anchored in objective reality*. Hence, as Zagzebski writes, ‘what we mean by “good person” or “virtue” or “right act” does not change, even if the persons we call “good,” the traits we call “virtues,” and the acts we call “right” undergo a gradual change. There is nonetheless *something there* that we are talking about all along when we undertake theoretical moral discourse, or more frequently, tell stories.’⁴⁹ The ‘something’ that is there, according to Exemplarism, is that of certain *necessary truths* concerning morality. More specifically, that is, morality is objectively grounded on the fact of there being *necessary a posteriori moral truths*—the position of which, according to Zagzebski,⁵⁰ can be supported by the following argument:

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- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| (5) (Moral Realism) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Necessarily, to be a good person is to be the same in admirability as persons <i>like that</i>. (ii) To be the same in admirability as persons like that consists in having the same deep psychological structure as they have. (iii) The deep psychological structure of persons like that consists in the following traits: generosity, fairness, compassion, and others, the components of which include identifiable emotional and behavioural dispositions. (iv) Therefore, necessarily, to be a good person is to have the traits listed under (iii) with their specific components. |
|---------------------|---|
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45. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, p. 62.

46. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, p. 64.

47. Virtues, though inter-definable with the other central concepts of our moral practice (such as motives, ends, acts and duty etc.), are to be taken as the moral concepts that play a more central role in an exemplarist framework. For more on this, see Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, pp. 99–116.

48. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this important point.

49. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, p. 226, emphasis added.

50. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, pp. 215–16.

For (i), this premise is a deliverance of the semantics of direct reference when applied to the notion of ‘good person’—such that if a certain individual is admirable, then it is *necessary* that to be a good (i.e., an admirable) person is to be the *same* in admirability as these specific persons are.⁵¹ Hence, those who are alike in admirability thus share something that objectively and necessarily ‘transcends’ the particular individual, provides the ground or source of their admirability, and ties each admirable person together. For (ii) and (iii), these premises are known *a posteriori* in the sense that they are on reflection what a specific individual admires, and is based on their reflective attempt to connect what they admire, on reflection, with what is, in fact, admirable.⁵² More specifically, in the process of discovery via reflection, one identifies the psychological structure of a bearer of admirability through observation of a purported admirable person *and* subjection of a range of their actions and features to the test of reflective admiration.⁵³ This ultimately then allows one to explain *how* they, in fact, discover the necessity of certain moral traits of a good person. Finally, for (iv), *if* this premise is true, then it is a *necessary* truth as it expresses the fact of what is necessary for being admirable—which is thus a truth that is discovered by the identification of what one admires on reflection.⁵⁴ Hence, in all, the appearance of subjectivity that is to be had by Exemplarism is thus tied to the *a posteriori* nature of the process of discovery that is centred on the particularized test of reflective admiration that can be performed by a given individual; nevertheless, this theory is indeed objectively grounded on the necessity of the moral truths that are expressed by the life of a good (admirable) person.⁵⁵

51. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

52. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

53. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

54. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*.

55. Further detailing the nature of the moral realism that is inherent within Exemplarism will take us too far afield. Thus, for a further detailed unpacking of the various ways in which moral realism and *a posteriori* necessity can be used by the theory of Exemplarism (such as that of an exemplarist interpretation of semantic externalism and Saul Kripke’s, Keith Donnellan’s and Nathan Salmon’s notion of the necessary *a posteriori*), see Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, pp. 212–35. Furthermore, one could ask, as an anonymous reviewer has, *how* one is to deal with this objective dimension of morality, given the direction of the current paper’s argument. Well, it is important to highlight here the flexibility (and non-committed nature) of the moral realism of Exemplarism (and the proposed theodicy that is grounded on it), as the version of moral realism featured in the main text allows one, on the one hand, to affirm the necessity of morality, yet, on the other hand, there being a difference between views concerning the correct conception of the nature of moral concepts, or what is exemplary morality (or what is exemplary suffering etc.) that is to be found amongst different cultures, based on the (fallible) process of discovery that centres on reflective admiration. Moreover, following Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, pp. 226–30, one could also adopt a relatively ‘weaker’ version of moral realism that does not require one to affirm the necessity of moral truths, but only that of its objectivity and flexibility across cultures (an explanation of how this all works is laid out comprehensively in the previously cited text of Zagzebski). Nevertheless, for the task at hand, either version of moral realism (the ‘*a posteriori* necessity’ version featured in the main text, or the ‘weaker’ version featured here) can be assumed as the foundation of the theory of Exemplarism that will then be subsequently utilized in developing the proposed theodicy.

In summary, Exemplarism is grounded upon an objective (necessary) theoretical foundation and experience that is trusted—namely, the experience of reflective admiration, which is shaped by narratives that are part of a common tradition and enables one to identify exemplars of goodness. Exemplarism thus affirms the importance of exemplars in grounding the various central facets of morality—where an exemplar is to be taken to be a person who is paradigmatically good—that is, they are most admirable. One identifies the admirable through the emotion of (reflective) admiration, which is focused on the admiration of acquired and deep traits of character or virtues possessed by an admirable person. A person who is admirable thus provides a basis for moral judgements and certain imitable behaviours—that is, they are imitable in respect to their admirable trait—and thus play an important role in grounding morality in our world.

Now that we have unpacked in great detail the framework of Exemplarism, one who affirms the existence of God can now ask the important question of why God will establish such a moral system? We can answer this question as follows: it is plausible that due to the holding of the Diffusiveness Principle, which can be stated as follows:⁵⁶

(6) (Diffusiveness)

Goodness is necessarily diffusive of itself

God would seek to manifest his goodness and bring about other good things. As the creation of conscious entities is plausibly a good thing, God would thus inevitably seek to undertake a creative activity that brings about other conscious entities—amongst the myriad of other entities that God would see that is good to create as well—let us term this action ‘creating a world’. Plausibly, part of this creative activity would be that of furthering the good among the created entities by enabling these entities to further the good themselves by living morally good lives—let us term this action ‘creating a *good* world’. For this to be the case, it would require the creation and/or promulgation of some system of morality. Now, one way in which God could do this would be by providing a revelation of a total moral law/code and requiring every person to follow it. We can illustrate this type of world in Figure 2 (where the ‘stick figurine’ represents a human individual, ‘G’ stands for goodness (i.e., the concepts of morality), and the ‘arrows’ represent the direction in which morality (i.e., goodness) is grounded).

56. Though the Diffusiveness Principle is not currently a guiding principle within contemporary ethics, it has a storied history, as shown by Norman Kretzmann, ‘A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?’, in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 208–28, that stems from the work of Plato, through Augustine and Aquinas and culminating in the work of Bonaventure—and so it should not be dismissed without argument. Furthermore, this principle does not clash with our intuitions and does not entail some further problematic ethical issues. Hence, one should adopt this principle unless there is a good reason not to—note, the lack of interest in the principle is not a successful rebutting or undercutting defeater of this principle!

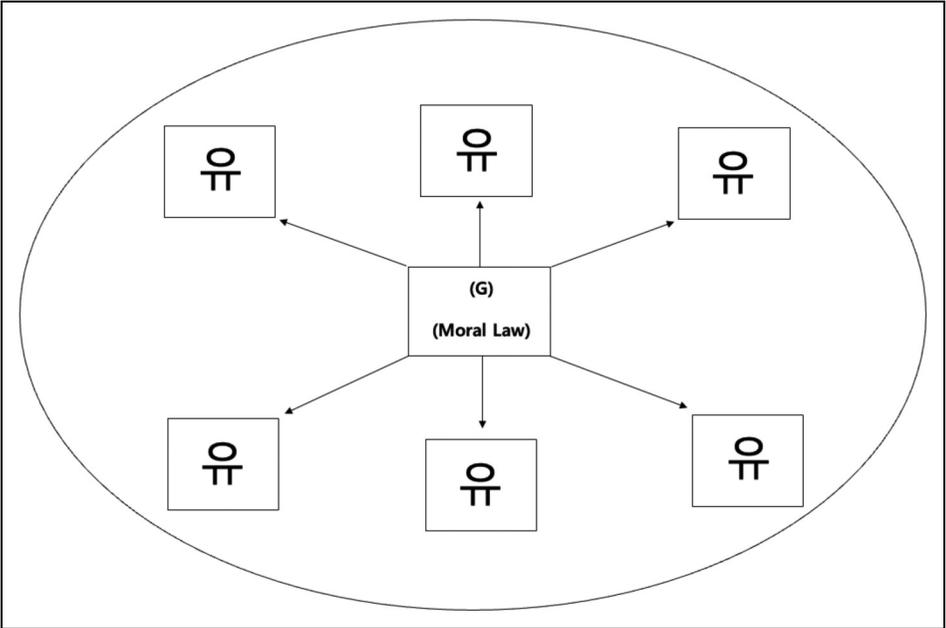


Figure 2. System of Morality in a Good World (i).

In creating this type of world—as is emphasized in the illustration by the direction in which morality is grounded (namely, from the moral law to the human individuals, and not vice versa)—God would forgo the good of giving humans much *responsibility* for what the moral foundation of his creation should be like. That is, a world in which morality was grounded in an overriding moral code—rather than human exemplars of goodness—would be one where humans have only very limited responsibility for our moral development and do not play a creative role in making the world into a ‘good world’—for example, a world in which there are many admirable persons who, through the imitability of the admirable, further the good that is present in the world by living virtuous lives. A God who gave agents only such limited responsibilities for the type of world we were to live in would not have given much, as God would not only have reserved for himself the all-important action of causing the world to exist but also the all-important choice of the kind of world it was to be—whilst, as Richard Swinburne has stated in a similar context, simply leaving humans with ‘the minor choice of filling in the details’.⁵⁷ That is, if great limits were set for the role that humans play in grounding moral concepts, our acquisition of moral knowledge, and our overall moral development—which would be so if God were to provide a total moral law/code—then God, as Swinburne further writes, ‘would be unable to give humans much real responsibility; he would be able to allow them only to play a toy

57. Swinburne, *Providence*, p. 99.

game'.⁵⁸ However, if God were to create a world in such a way that all of morality is rooted in exemplars of morality—and thus all humans having been given the opportunity to acquire the traits (grounded in the deep psychological structure) that enable an individual to be an admirable person—then humans would have been given a share in God's creation—a share in the ability to further the good by living admirable lives that—through one directly referring to them—can be emulated by others. We can now illustrate *this* type of world in Figure 3 (where, again, the 'stick figurine' represents a human individual (who is now an exemplar of goodness), 'G' stands for goodness (i.e., the concepts of morality), and the 'arrows' represent the direction in which morality (i.e., goodness) is grounded).⁵⁹

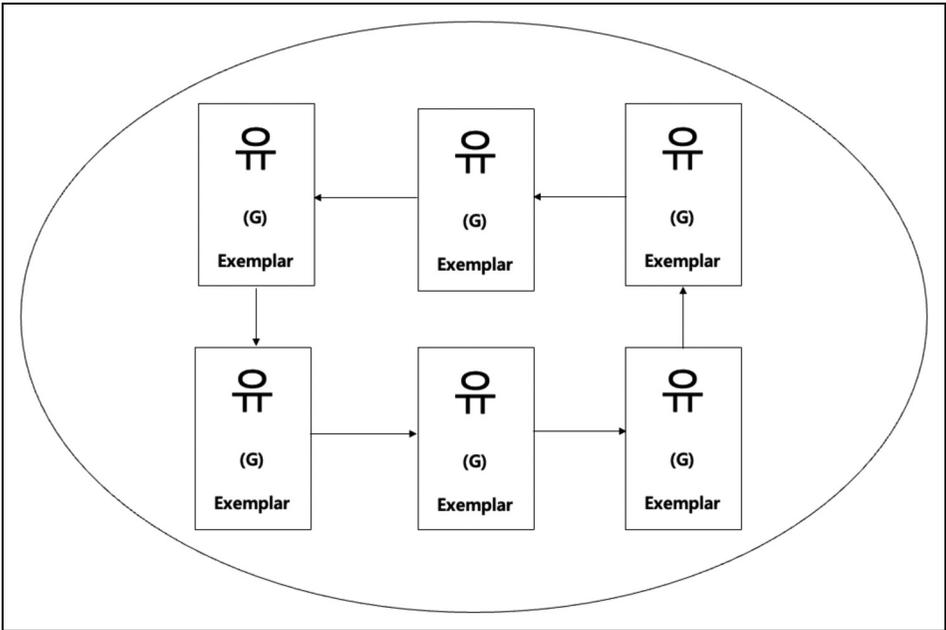


Figure 3. System of Morality in a Good World (ii).

The lives of exemplary people—as is now emphasized in this illustration by the direction in which morality is grounded (namely, from one human individual (who fulfils the role of an exemplar) to another human individual (who emulates them))—would thus fulfil the role of grounding morality in our world. In this world, direct reference would be made to exemplars of goodness, with the central concepts of our moral practice

58. Swinburne, *God*, p. 93.

59. The following illustration should, again, be understood through an (objective) moral realist framework, rather than that of a subjectivist framework (as it might appear in the illustration)—as, even though one 'learns' morality through the type of communal framework expressed by this illustration, morality is ultimately anchored in objective reality as well—namely, that of the necessary moral truths.

being defined by this reference, and thus this world would be able to be made into a ‘good world’ by each and every human individual playing a part in living an admirable life, which would motivate others (who admire them) to emulate their lives, and thus, because of this, they themselves would also become admirable—which would ultimately manifest the good in the world. By utilizing this framework, God would thus allow all humans to *creatively flourish* by them participating in his creative role of spreading goodness and grounding morality in the world.⁶⁰ That is, humans would be provided with the opportunity to live truly flourishing lives by spreading goodness in our world—and thus, each human fulfilling a creative role that is akin to the role that God fulfils in creating the world. Hence, a good God, like a good father, will delegate this type of responsibility.⁶¹ And thus, we have reason to believe that God would utilize an exemplarist methodology when it comes to grounding morality, rather than that of grounding it solely (or at all) in a total moral law/code.⁶² So, we have a reason in hand to understand why a theist should affirm Exemplarism; however, the important question now is: how does someone become an exemplar? This question has not been sufficiently answered by Zagzebski in her formulation of Exemplarism—with her main focus on being how one can become an exemplar based on the emulation of an *already existing exemplar* and thus not how one can actually become an exemplar *in the first place*. However, we can answer this question by utilizing the notion of a ‘transformative experience’ that has been proposed, in a different context, by L.A. Paul.

To be an exemplar, one has to gain this status, rather than one starting with this status—a central fact concerning the emotion of (reflective) admiration is that this emotion is only for acquired traits and not natural traits.⁶³ It is posited here that *how* an individual gains this status (i.e., becomes an exemplar) is by transforming into one—that is, by undergoing a *transformative experience*. We can unpack this now in more detail as follows: according to Paul,⁶⁴ there is a certain type of experience (or a set of experiences) that are distinguished from other types of experiences by the *transformative role* that they fulfil in an individual’s life. This type of experience is termed a ‘transformative experience’—the nature of which can be construed more precisely as follows:

A transformative experience is one that is transformative at the epistemic and personal levels. An epistemically transformative experience is one that provides an individual with knowledge that was previously unavailable or inaccessible—that is, the acquisition of this

60. Where, at a general level, to ‘flourish’ is to ‘develop successfully’, ‘to the fullest’ or to ‘thrive’.

61. Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

62. I say ‘solely’ here to keep open the possibility of God providing a moral code (e.g., the Ten Commandments) in addition to moral exemplars.

63. More fully, one could ask the question of why God could not already create us as exemplars from the beginning—rather than us having to undergo experiences that transform us into one—well, the reason why God could not is due to the fact that admiration is for *acquired* traits and not natural traits; hence, if one is to become an admirable individual and enable others to emulate them, then they will need to acquire the various virtues that make them into exemplars—rather than God having given them these traits from the outset.

64. L.A. Paul, *Transformative Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

(7) (Transformative Experience)	An experience or set of experiences that are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Epistemically transformative: it allows one to obtain knowledge, through experience(s), that otherwise could not be obtained. (ii) Personally transformative: it provides a change to one's values, preferences and overall character.
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knowledge is dependent upon the experience. For example, prior to eating the fruit of a durian, one cannot know what it is like to taste a durian, as Paul notes:

When I taste it for the first time, by becoming acquainted with this taste, I'll undergo an epistemically transformative experience, and gain new knowledge, the knowledge of what it's like to taste a durian. The knowledge comes from the fact that, when I taste the durian, the intrinsic nature of having this type of taste experience is revealed to me, allowing me to grasp a new subjective value.⁶⁵

A personally transformative experience is one that changes the identity of a person by altering their values, desires, goals, preferences, and viewpoint on reality—that is, it changes the entire character or subjectivity of the person. For example, as Paul further notes, paradigm examples of a personally transformative experience would be such a thing as 'gaining a new sensory ability, having a traumatic accident, undergoing major surgery, winning an Olympic gold medal, participating in a revolution, having a religious conversion, having a child, experiencing the death of a parent, making a major scientific discovery, or experiencing the death of a child'.⁶⁶ Thus, taking all of these things into account, transformative experience is thus one that is dually transformative: it teaches you something new—something that one could not have known before having that specific experience—whilst also, at the same time, it radically changes the person. In short, a transformative experience is an experience that is *both* epistemically and personally transformative. Yet, further distinctions can be made concerning the nature of this type of experience, as the taxonomy of a transformative experience, according to Carel and Kidd,⁶⁷ can be divided, firstly, according to the *voluntariness* of the experience and, secondly, according to the *effect* of the experience in the individual's life. Paul introduces the notion of a transformative experience in the context of a voluntary transformative experience—an experience that is elected by the individual.⁶⁸ However, Carel and Kidd see the need to expand the types of experiences that can count as transformative in order to include involuntary and non-voluntary transformative experiences—experiences that are either partially elected by the individual or entirely unelected by the individual.⁶⁹ Three paradigm examples of these categories of transformative experience can be understood as such in Table 1.

65. Paul, *Transformative*, p. 15.

66. Paul, *Transformative*, p. 15.

67. Carel and Kidd, 'Expanding', pp. 7–11.

68. Paul, *Transformative*.

69. Carel and Kidd, 'Expanding'.

Table 1. Categories of Transformative Experiences.

Voluntary	Non-Voluntary	Involuntary
Suppose that an individual has been offered the chance to become a vampire. All of your friends and family have become vampires and have told the individual that they love the experience of being one. The lead vampire of your town has offered this individual the chance to become a vampire and now has a choice to become one or not. This experience is a transformative experience: it is epistemically transformative as prior to becoming a vampire, one cannot know one's future preferences about being a vampire (e.g., whether they will like drinking blood or not) or the nature of the experience (e.g., what it is like to live on blood) and it is personally transformative as the individual is completely changed as a person. ¹⁸⁵	At the age of 24, Primo Levi was arrested in Italy and sent to the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz on the German–Polish border, where he survived for twenty-two months. The experience left an indelible mark on Levi. This experience is a transformative experience: it was epistemically transformative, as it taught Levi what starvation, imprisonment, torture, cruelty, total lack of control, severe illness, deprivation and degradation are. It was also personally transformative as he himself says: 'I do not and cannot know what I would be today if I had not been in the camp [...] this would be, precisely, a case of describing a future that never took place'. ¹⁸⁶	I see a young child run into the path of an oncoming car. Instinctively, I rush into the road, pick up the child, but the car hits me. The child survives unharmed, but I am severely injured, losing the ability to walk. In this case, I am causally responsible for the outcome, but did not intend it. This experience is a transformative experience: my new disability changes who I am, my future preferences, and what I know about myself and life. I would not have chosen to become disabled, but the choice to save the child was taken by me. I am transformed, but through an unintended consequence of a choice I make. ¹⁸⁷

Within each of the categories of transformative experience, a particular experience, according to Carel and Kidd,⁷⁰ can be either positively or negatively valenced such that a transformative experience can take one of four general forms:

1. Positive Epistemic Transformation and Positive Personal Transformation

An experience that causes a person to gain new knowledge and develop positive character traits, values, and an overall positive subjectivity.

2. Positive Epistemic Transformation and Negative Personal Transformation

An experience that causes a person to gain new knowledge and develop negative character traits, values, and an overall negative subjectivity.

3. Negative Epistemic Transformation and Positive Personal Transformation

An experience that causes a person to lose knowledge, or abandon intellectual activities, and develop positive character traits, values, and an overall positive subjectivity.

4. Negative Epistemic Transformation and Negative Personal Transformation

An experience that causes a person to lose knowledge, or abandon intellectual activities, and develop negative character traits, values, and an overall negative subjectivity.

70. Carel and Kidd, 'Expanding', p. 9.

Transformative experiences can thus be voluntary and non-voluntary or involuntary, and within these categories, a particular experience can be both negatively and positively valenced. This distinction between the different types of transformative experiences is seen clearly in the paradigm examples detailed above. However, this does not mean that for an experience *to be* transformative, it must be as grandiose as these. Rather, as Carel and Kidd have shown, one can adopt a *minimalist* understanding of a transformative experience, such that the category of a transformative experience can include the more dramatic experiences featured above as well as a range of more mundane experiences that cumulatively affect change that amounts to a transformative experience.⁷¹ More precisely, it is quite clear that humans acquire new information about things every day—which can often be trivial, or tacit—and over time, through various experiences, humans acquire a range of traits—and increase or decrease in the level of possession of those traits, such as becoming more or less tolerant or patient, having a better or worse judgement about certain issues, or increasing or reducing their level of aggression and excitability.⁷² Amongst these various daily experiences, at least some of them can be classed as a transformative experience, as they enable one to know something that they could not have learned otherwise—for example, as Carel and Kidd write, ‘what it means to age and how slow changes in our embodied situation can affect our existential awareness of our mortality’.⁷³ And thus, a number of one’s daily and unexceptional experiences can be classed as epistemically transformative. Similarly, humans regularly experience changes to their preferences, desires, values and goals—even if on a daily basis, this is only done each time minimally. This is so, as Carel and Kidd further note, because ‘otherwise we would not make the transition from childhood to adulthood, and on to older age. We become better planners, with more realistic goals; we become better at recognizing and controlling our desires, we have increasingly mature preferences and values, and so on’.⁷⁴ Again, at least in a small manner, these types of changes are the result of certain experiences that transform an individual; hence, these too would also amount to experiences that are personally transformative. One thus has both elements of a transformative experience present in the more mundane experiences of an individual’s daily life: one can have an epistemic transformation in virtue of them having new experiences every day—even if these experiences are of a repetitious and mundane nature, and one can have a personal transformation, in virtue of their being an updating of one’s value, desires, preferences and goals—even if this is done minimally.⁷⁵ A transformative experience can thus be deep, significant, and unexpected, or it could be the result of experiences that have the cumulative effect of small changes.

So, with all of this in hand, we can answer the important question of how one becomes an exemplar by saying that an individual becomes one by undergoing a specific transformative experience. This experience (or set of experiences) would be one that is

71. Carel and Kidd, ‘Expanding’, pp. 11–12.

72. Carel and Kidd, ‘Expanding’.

73. Carel and Kidd, ‘Expanding’, p. 11.

74. Carel and Kidd, ‘Expanding’, p. 12.

75. Carel and Kidd, ‘Expanding’.

epistemically transformative—in that new information would be gained that is relevant to the exemplar fulfilling the role in which they are taken to be admirable—such as information and/or traits that are relevant to being a hero, a saint, or sage—which could not be had without them undergoing this experience. Furthermore, this experience (or set of experiences) would result in there being a change in their values, desires, goals, preferences, and viewpoint on reality in such a way that the person now becomes admirable—that is, the person would gain a heroic, saintly, or sagely character or subjectivity. This transformative experience could be voluntary—in that the individual chooses to become exemplary (by choosing to become a more admirable person), or it could be involuntary or non-voluntary—in that, for the former, the individual chose to become an exemplar, but not the means of becoming one or the resultant epistemic and personal transformation that took place. And for the latter, the individual did not choose to become an exemplar but (in some manner) fell into this role—by the situation that they were in—causing them to undergo the needed epistemic and personal transformation to become an admirable person. Furthermore, this transformative experience would be one that is positively valenced—in that, a positive epistemic transformation and positive personal transformation would need to take place in order for one to become an admirable person—and this could be sudden, deep, significant, and unexpected, or it could be gradual and the accumulation of small, daily epistemic and personal changes to the individual. An individual thus can become an exemplar—and thus fulfil the role of being a ground of morality—by undergoing a transformative experience into an admirable person. God, who desires for all humans to ‘creatively flourish’ by playing a part in the creative role that can be had by an exemplar in our world (i.e., the making of our world into a ‘good world’), would allow individuals to undergo these transformative experiences. However, one can now ask the important question of what type of transformative experience would be the most effective, or, in fact, the only means for doing this? It is suggested here that experiences of suffering are the transformative experiences that are needed for this task. That is, what is needed is an *opportunity* for one to acquire the traits (i.e., virtues) that enable one to be admirable; as Zagzebski writes, ‘Opportunity is a necessary condition for the [admirable] behavior, and we probably all agree that the persons we consider exemplars would not be recognized as exemplary had their circumstances not given them the opportunity to rise to moral heights’.⁷⁶ It is posited here that an experience of suffering (that is permitted by God) is that opportunity and necessary condition that allows one to ‘rise to moral heights’. We will now focus on understanding why this is so and thus complete the formulation of our theodicy.

Transforming into an Exemplar

An experience of suffering is the vehicle for transformation that provides the opportunity for the cultivation and exercise of the central virtues that make an individual admirable and, thus, an exemplar. In Exemplarism, as noted previously, there are (at least) three categories of exemplars: the hero, the saint, and the sage, with the virtue of courage being associated with the first category, the virtue of charity being associated with the second category, and the virtue of

76. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, p. 62, parenthesis original.

wisdom being associated with the third category. We can now take the transformative experience that is undergone by an exemplar to be best understood as follows:

For someone to become an exemplar, it is necessary for them to experience suffering that is doubly transformative: epistemically and personally transformative. This transformation into an exemplar, which is now construed within a context of suffering,

(8) (Exemplar Transformative Experience)	An experience or set of experiences that are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Epistemically transformative: it allows one to obtain knowledge and the <i>virtue of wisdom</i>, through experience(s), that otherwise could not be obtained. (ii) Personally transformative: it provides a change to one's values, preferences and overall character, which results in the acquisition of the <i>character of courage and morality</i>—and thus, from this, the <i>virtues of courage and charity</i>.
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could be voluntary—in that one actively chooses to become an exemplar and undergo the suffering experience that is required—or it could be non-voluntary or involuntary—in that the transformation into an exemplar, and the suffering experience that is required, is partially chosen or entirely unchosen. Furthermore, this transformation could take place in a deep, significant, or unexpected manner—with the suffering that facilitates this transformation (such as a sudden, life-changing accident) also being experienced in this way—or it could be the result of experiences that have the cumulative effect of small changes—with the suffering that facilitates this transformation (such as a slowly debilitating physical illness), again, being also experienced in this way. Lastly, even though the suffering that is necessary for this transformation to take place is a *negative* experience, the transformation itself would be an experience that is positively valenced—as there is a positive gain, rather than a loss, in knowledge, virtues, and character development. This transformation is thus one that allows an individual to progress—through their experience of suffering—to become an exemplar—and thus serve as a ground of morality and play an important role in God's creative activity. Now, how this is so is because of the fact that, by an individual suffering in a manner that enables them to undergo a transformative experience (at an epistemic and personal level), they are able to *acquire the virtues* that are necessary to be an instance of one, or more, of the three categories of exemplars noted above—namely, a hero, a saint, and a sage. More precisely, in adopting Michael Brady's virtue-theoretic approach to suffering,⁷⁷ and taking each type of transformative experience, in turn, an experience of suffering is epistemically transformative by it providing the opportunity for one to acquire the virtue of *wisdom* (which is the central virtue associated with the sage category).⁷⁸

77. Brady, *Suffering*; Michael Brady, 'Why Suffering is Essential to Wisdom', *Journal of Value Inquiry* 53.3 (2019), pp. 467–69.

78. The epistemic aspect of this transformation is not the gaining of new knowledge as such but the acquisition of a virtue (i.e., wisdom) that provides a deeper transformation to the *epistemic stance* of that individual—which is included as a form of epistemic transformation by Carel and Kidd ('Expanding', p. 10).

A wise person, such as Confucius,⁷⁹ is one who is thought to possess a deep understanding of various important aspects of themselves, their world and reality as a whole.⁸⁰ As Jason Baehr states, ‘Wise persons characteristically possess a uniquely insightful and accurate grasp or understanding of whatever they are wise about. A wise person is not confused, muddled, or ignorant’.⁸¹ Of central importance in the expression of this virtue is a general understanding or knowledge of *value*, and the various problems that are experienced by humans. As Baehr further writes:

a wise person knows what is ultimately good or important within the sphere of human life and activity. She can reliably distinguish, and presumably with some level of awareness and understanding, between things that are of ultimate importance in life and things that are not.⁸²

A similar line of reasoning is provided by Roger Walsh when he writes: ‘Self-knowledge is essential for sagacity, but so too is deep, accurate insight and understanding of the central existential issues of life ... Existential issues are dilemmas that we all face, simply by virtue of our existence as human beings’.⁸³ Wisdom thus requires an understanding of what is good or important. Importantly, however, wisdom does not only involve the epistemic state of understanding of what is good and important, but also that of the ability to make good choices or decisions concerning how one is to respond to the specific moral challenge or existential situation that they are presented with (an idea, as Brady notes,⁸⁴ that is central to Aristotle’s account of *phronesis*).⁸⁵ That is, wisdom is a virtue that requires a particular excellence in decision-making and problem-solving, and, as a certain corollary to this, an excellence in giving advice to others as to how they should respond to their moral or existential situation. As Nic Weststrate and Judith Glück write, ‘We define wisdom as a body of experience-based knowledge about the fundamental issues of human life that is both broad and deep, and implicit and explicit. Wisdom manifests outwardly in the form of exceptional advice-giving, decision-making, and problem-solving capacities’.⁸⁶ Hence, the capacity for

79. For a detailed summary of the life and exemplary work of Confucius, see Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, pp. 84–89.

80. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 125.

81. Jason Baehr, ‘Wisdom, Suffering, and Humility’, *Journal of Value Inquiry* 53.3 (2019), pp. 397–413 (401).

82. Baehr, ‘Wisdom’, p. 401.

83. Roger Walsh, ‘What is Wisdom? Cross-Cultural and Cross-Disciplinary Syntheses’, *Review of General Psychology* 19.3 (2015), pp. 278–93 (285).

84. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 126.

85. This point is important for Aristotle (and Thomas Aquinas, who follows him), as he (they) take wisdom to not just be the attainment of knowledge, but also the right use of knowledge in its particulars. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point and the importance of associating the virtue of wisdom not only with that of epistemology (in the present context, the epistemic state of ‘understanding’) but also with that of morality (which, as will now be detailed in the main text, is the ability to practically impact and influence one’s self and others).

86. Nic Weststrate and Judith Glück, ‘Hard-Earned Wisdom: Explanatory Processing of Difficult Life Experience is Positively Associated with Wisdom’, *Developmental Psychology* 53.4 (2017), pp. 800–814 (800).

one to make good decisions (problem solve) and provide good advice to others—which is *essential* to wisdom—is based upon an individual’s understanding of, and insight into, what is, in fact, morally valuable.

Now, how suffering plays an essential role in enabling one to acquire this type of understanding (and ability) is in two specific ways: first, the existence of suffering is necessary for disclosing certain values to an individual. More precisely, one way in which suffering discloses certain values is by providing a means for one to come to, firstly, *appreciate* certain values. One important set of values are those that are contrasted with suffering—in that one can only understand or grasp the goodness of a specific state of affairs if they have experienced the contrasting state of affairs (for example, love and companionship can only be appreciated after one has experienced certain forms of heart-break and loneliness).⁸⁷ This appreciative value of suffering can be further understood in two ways: first, the experience of certain types of pleasures require that one experience suffering, due to the fact that the pleasure itself is defined in terms of the *relief* from a certain form of suffering. Second, a prior experience of a certain form of suffering can serve as a means of *intensifying* the experience of some value—such that the latter suffering intensifies our experience of a value in a manner that the latter is able to be taken as a more pleasurable experience. In addition to these two ways, suffering also provides a means for one to access certain values; it, as Brady notes, is ‘essential for our knowledge of aspects of the evaluative realm’.⁸⁸ More specifically, suffering, as Brady further writes, ‘facilitates our understanding of a wide range of negative values, by focusing our attention onto evaluative situations, and motivating the search for reasons that bear on whether things are as they are emotionally presented as being’.⁸⁹ Without some form of affective engagement, an individual would be ignorant of a particular class of values, which include, on the positive side, according to Mark Johnston, ‘the beautiful, the charming, [and] the erotic’, and on the negative side, ‘the banal ... the horrific and the plain old ... repellent’.⁹⁰ A negative experience is thus the means in which certain negative values are disclosed to us, as Johnston further writes, ‘[i]f one has never been moved or affected by the determinate ways in which things are beautiful or charming or erotic or banal or sublime or appealing, then one is ignorant of the relevant determinate values’.⁹¹ Based on this, one can thus say that an experience of suffering is epistemically necessary for an individual to understand or cognitively grasp a particular class of negative values. Without suffering, as Brady notes, ‘our knowledge of the world of values would be impoverished’.⁹²

The second way in which suffering is necessary for one to acquire the understanding that is essential to wisdom can be seen by focusing on the notion of reflectiveness. That is,

87. Brady, *Suffering*.

88. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 130.

89. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 130.

90. Mark Johnston, ‘The Authority of Affect’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63.1 (2001), pp. 181–214 (182), parenthesis added.

91. Johnston, ‘Authority’, p. 183.

92. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 129.

the existence of suffering—of the kind that is a result of difficult life experiences—produces a beneficial form of reflection that is needed for wisdom—and it does this to an even greater extent than a positive experience. Thus, as Brady writes, the ‘kind of beneficial reflection thought to be at the heart of posttraumatic and stress-related growth is a kind of self-reflection, in which a person tries to understand and make sense of her experiences, and fit them into a broader narrative of her life’.⁹³ The negative events experienced by an individual produces more cognitive activity and a greater amount of effort to engage in causal reasoning than the positive events experienced by that person—as negative events cry out for an explanation of their occurrence and provide a challenge for the individual to make sense of the bad state of affairs.⁹⁴ Hence, reflection—understood in this context as the *exploratory processing of a difficult event*—is a key determinant of and associated intimately with wisdom. A helpful unpacking of this point has been provided by Weststrate and Glück who state that, ‘Through self-reflection, individuals reconstruct, analyze, and interpret real-life sequences of thought, emotion, and action for meaning. The life lessons and insights arrived at through self-reflection lead to an ever-deepening and more complex appreciation of life, which we might call wisdom.’⁹⁵ The reflection that certain individuals have in mind is not focused on providing an understanding of *why* an object or event has a certain level of value.⁹⁶ Rather, the notion of an exploratory process, as Weststrate and Glück further write, is an ‘investigative, analytical, and interpretive approach to self-reflection on life events, which emphasizes meaning-making (i.e., extracting lessons and insights), complexity, and growth from the past’.⁹⁷ One can now ask the important question of why reflection on negative experiences should be associated with the existence and expression of wisdom? We can answer this question in two ways: first, by an individual experiencing a form of suffering, an individual can reflect on this experience in a way that allows them to realize the fragility of life, which would aid their understanding of it. Second, there is (plausibly) a very close link between suffering and attention—for example, when someone feels a negative emotion such as grief, they would focus on and be attentive to their loss, at the expense of other possible objects of their attention, or when someone is in a state of disappointment, they are solely focused on the event that caused their disappointment.⁹⁸ Indeed, as Brady helpfully writes, ‘emotional effects on the focus of attention are particularly pronounced with negative emotion, with considerable evidence indicating that “negative” emotion focuses attention more narrowly on the relevant object or event than positive emotion, facilitating a “local” rather than a “global” appraisal of that object or event’.⁹⁹ In the case of the experience of a negative emotion—and plausibly in the case of other forms of suffering as well—there is a need for ‘attentional persistence’. The attentional persistence that is to be had by an experience of suffering can

93. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 468.

94. Brady, *Suffering*.

95. Weststrate and Glück, ‘Wisdom’, p. 802.

96. Brady, *Suffering*.

97. Weststrate and Glück, ‘Wisdom’, p. 802.

98. Brady, ‘Wisdom’.

99. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 130.

help to motivate a person to reflect on the objects and events involved, leading to two important outcomes: first, this reflection will allow one to discover the reason that supports the accuracy of the initial emotional appraisal of the event and, second, through this reflection one is also able to determine what is the appropriate behavioural response to the object or event. In other words, as Brady writes, ‘the persistence of attention in experiences of suffering can motivate the search for and discovery of reasons, and in so doing can facilitate a judgement as to whether emotional appearance matches evaluative reality’.¹⁰⁰ The attentional persistence that is to be had by an experience of suffering motivates reflection upon the situation that the individual is in and the decision that is to be made that would best respond to this existential situation. So emotional persistence, as Brady notes, ‘can enable the subject to determine whether what appears to be dangerous or shameful really is dangerous or shameful, through keeping attention fixed on these questions and promoting critical reflection about them; and it (thereby) facilitates a decision on how best to deal with the danger or shamefulness’.¹⁰¹ Suffering thus provides a motivation for theoretical and practical reflection about the experience, where—without this kind of reflection—individuals would not be in a position to decide what is the correct thing to do and to provide advice for what someone else should do in the important areas of human experience.¹⁰² Hence on this basis, the appreciation of certain values and the opportunity to reflect on negative experiences, which is provided by one experiencing suffering, establishes the needed grounds for not only understanding, but also that of the ability to make decisions, problem-solve, and advise others within their challenging existential (and moral) situation.

Taking all of these things into account, the existence of suffering is necessary for the development and expression of two central elements of wisdom—first, a deep understanding (and appreciation) of value/ability to make effective decisions, and, second, a self-reflective attitude—such that without these two elements, it would not be possible for one to possess wisdom. In other words, suffering (though not sufficient for one to gain wisdom) is indeed a necessary condition for the possession of it—and thus, for one to become an exemplar of wisdom, one needs to undergo the epistemically transformative experience that is provided by suffering.

In addition to the epistemically transformative nature of a suffering experience, which enables one to become a specific type of exemplar—that of an exemplar of wisdom—suffering also has a personally transformative nature that allows one to also become a heroic and/or saintly exemplar. More precisely, and in adopting Brady’s virtue-theoretic approach to suffering again, we can take an experience of suffering to be personally transformative for an individual by providing the opportunity for one to acquire a collection of virtues known as *courageous character* and *moral character* (both of which would include the central virtues associated with the hero category and saint category).¹⁰³ We

100. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 131.

101. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 131.

102. Brady, ‘Wisdom’.

103. Brady prefers the term ‘strength of character’ to ‘courageous character’. I adopt the latter in this article and utilize the former at times.

can now see how suffering fulfils this important role as follows: for courageous character, such as that shown in the life of Leopold Socha,¹⁰⁴ it is quite clear that one undergoing a suffering experience is necessary for the development of a certain range of important personal virtues that constitute this type of character. Courageous character is a type of positive attitude towards one's suffering and includes the class of traits of courage, forbearance, patience, and resilience.¹⁰⁵ These traits involve a certain disposition to stand firm against potential threats and the ability to reliably govern one's feelings and actions. We can now see this by focusing our attention on the traits of courage and patience that play an important role in developing one's strength of character. Firstly, an individual who possesses the trait of courage is one who faces fear and danger—not for honour, or out of ignorance—but for the goodness of the end that is involved in the situation. Hence, the positive attitude that is distinctive of this form of strength is focused on the good. Thus, for example, as Brady notes, 'the courageous firefighter does not risk his life when entering a burning building for the honour of facing up to and overcoming danger, but instead for the sake of the people who are threatened by the fire'.¹⁰⁶ There is thus a non-egoistic aim associated with the virtue of courage such that an individual who possesses the contrasting state—a coward—is one that values to a greater extent their safety and/or comfort more than a specific greater good that they could obtain by risking them. In contrast, a courageous person is one that desires this greater good such that they pursue this good without any hesitation.¹⁰⁷ Secondly, for patience, this virtue (whose Latin root word *pati* means 'to suffer' or 'to endure') is the voluntary and prolonged endurance of a difficult state for the sake of a certain good. Hence, patience involves the ability for one to wait and not seek a smaller present good—by overvaluing present benefits over future benefits—and thus endure the present lack of this good in order to acquire the greater good at a later time. Thus, as with the virtue of courage, this form of psychological strength is conceived of as a positive attitude towards some valuable end or goal that is had in the face of a difficult state. For example, as Brady writes, the 'patient teacher thus endures the trials and tribulations of dealing with difficult pupils, for the sake of the pupils'.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, in taking the virtues of courage and patience (along with the further virtues of forbearance and resilience) to constitute courageous character, then we can see that courageous character requires having certain positive attitudes in the face of adversity, hardships and other types of suffering. In short, suffering, as Brady notes, 'is essential for the development and expression of (the virtues that constitute) strength of character'.¹⁰⁹ There is thus a logical relationship between the virtues that constitute courageous character and suffering, such that it is the logical condition for the existence and expression of these virtues.

104. For a detailed summary of the life and exemplary work of Leopold Socha, see Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, pp. 70–76.

105. Brady, *Suffering*.

106. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 95.

107. Brady, *Suffering*.

108. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 96.

109. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 96.

Now, for moral character, undergoing a suffering experience is also necessary for the cultivation and development of this type of character. Moral character, in a behavioural context, is a pattern of behaviour that is made up of a specific set of moral virtues that include compassion, sympathy, empathy, and forgiveness. These moral virtues, which were expressed clearly in the life of Giuseppe Moscati,¹¹⁰ are such that one cannot develop them without the existence of suffering. That is, these moral virtues logically require the existence of suffering—which could be the suffering of one's self or the suffering of others. For example, in order for one to feel compassion towards another individual—to have concern for another's suffering—one needs to encounter the suffering of others and learn how to help them to appropriately deal with it.¹¹¹ Or, for one to sympathize with another individual—to have feelings of pity and sorrow for that individual's misfortune—there must be something that counts as their misfortune. For one to empathize with another individual—to have the ability to understand and share the pain of another—one must be in pain. And for one to be forgiving towards another individual—to cease to be resentful for a wrong suffered—one must have been wronged. Hence, the existence of suffering is essential to the development and expression of the various moral virtues that constitute an excellent moral character. In addition to the necessity of the suffering of others for the development of a moral character, one can also maintain that the individual *themselves* must experience suffering in order to develop this character. We can see how this is so for three reasons: first, according to Brady,¹¹² if a given state of affairs is intrinsically bad, then one hating this bad state of affairs—that is, one desiring for the bad state of affairs to not obtain or one being pained by the obtaining of the bad state of affairs—is intrinsically good. Given this, it is intrinsically good for an individual to be sympathetically pained by another person's pain—that is, to feel compassion for that individual's pain—and to desire and/or try to relieve their pain. Hence, one being pained by the suffering of another, or some other type of disvalue, is an attitude towards bad things that is itself an intrinsic good. Thus, an individual who aims at furthering the good—which

110. In Zagzebski, *Exemplarist*, pp. 80–83, the paradigm example of a saint used by Zagzebski is that of Jean Vanier; however, due to recent revelations concerning the deplorability of Vanier, the example used in the main text is that of a clearer paradigm of sainthood: Giuseppe Moscati. Moreover, the issue raised by the failure of Vanier to be an admirable individual highlights the need for one to formulate criteria that can guide the process of reflective admiration. These criteria do not, however, have to be detached from the set of exemplars; rather, the set of exemplars can act as the source of these criteria through one utilizing a process such as 'reflective equilibrium'—the deliberative process in which an individual reflects on certain paradigm examples and then revises their beliefs based on this reflection. This process is widely utilized by individuals in the field of normative ethics, and we can use it to help us derive the needed moral criteria from the set of exemplars by one undergoing the deliberative process in which one reflects on a purported set of exemplars over time and then revises their beliefs concerning members of this set in light of issues raised against them. Showing how this can be done with more detail, will be taken up in later work. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for identifying this issue.

111. Brady, *Suffering*.

112. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 121. Brady follows Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

one with a moral character would seek to do—is the type of person, as Brady writes, who ‘will be pained by those wrongs and disvalues that compassion, benevolence, heroism, and self-sacrifice are responses to’.¹¹³ Thus, the moral virtues that constitute a moral character—such as compassion—require that the individual who has that character suffer themselves in the form of them being pained by disvalue. Secondly, one can also see the necessity of one experiencing suffering in order to develop a moral character by reflecting on the psychological profile of a compassionate and forgiving person. That is, we can consider two scenarios where, first, someone only has positive feelings of loving care and concern when they encounter or hear of those who are in need—such as a group of orphaned youth who have been forced to flee their country after suffering the loss of their parents. Second, we can also see this in a scenario where someone, who is in a relationship with another person, is willing—due to the love and care she has for the other person—to forgive the constant infidelity of their partner—without them first feeling deeply hurt and angry by the betrayal that they have experienced.¹¹⁴ In the first case, we have someone who is not pained by the plight of the suffering individuals, but rather they maintain a positive demeanour in the face of their suffering and need. It is clear that in this case, the individual is lacking something in their character—as it would seem to be better for them—in a way that makes them a more excellent person—that they should also feel in some way bad for the orphans’ situation, in addition to them feeling loving care for the suffering individuals.¹¹⁵ In the second case, we have an individual that fails to feel pained by the betrayal that they have experienced—which cries out for explanation. We would raise issues against the individual’s sensitivity to the situation as we would expect them to express a negative stance towards the bad states of affairs before the individual, in response to an act of repentance on the part of the partner, adopts a positive stance towards it through forgiving them. Thus, we implicitly agree, according to Brady, that in both cases, ‘feeling pain is in fact appropriate or rationally warranted’.¹¹⁶ One would regard a failure for a person to be pained by the suffering of others and the suffering that they are experiencing to be inconsistent with the development of a moral character—that is, being pained by bad states of affairs is necessary for the virtuous response of compassion and loving forgiveness.

Third, one can also acquire empirical support for the view that it is necessary for one to experience suffering in order to develop a moral character.¹¹⁷ According to Brady,¹¹⁸ for a number of individuals, such as Laurence Kohlberg and Jesse Prinz,¹¹⁹ the experience of a negative emotion is essential to the moral development of a person, especially in the case where ‘people take the first steps on the path to becoming moral creatures’. One can see

113. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 121.

114. Brady, *Suffering*.

115. Brady, *Suffering*.

116. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 122.

117. This, as with other areas of the theodicy, links up well with Zagzebski’s, *Exemplarist*, desire to ground elements of Exemplarism on an empirical foundation.

118. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 122.

119. Laurence Kohlberg, *The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); Jesse Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

this evidenced in the first three stages of moral development proposed by Kohlberg—where, in the first stage, children are motivated to perform an action by having thoughts concerning obedience and punishment and with them being motivated to not perform a wrongful action due to the threat of punishment.¹²⁰ In the second stage, children are able to process thoughts in a more instrumental manner and are motivated by thoughts of reward for them performing good actions. And then, at stage three, children are now motivated by the attainment of a certain ideal—such as being a ‘good boy or girl’ and thus, at this stage, are seeking approval from others. Now, according to Brady, it seems plausible to assume that emotions play an important role in each of these stages, where ‘for children to learn and be moved to obey the rules at stage one through threats of punishment; at stage two by the desire for benefit; and at stage three by an emotional need to fit in and be liked by others’.¹²¹ These emotional states would include negative affective experiences where, at stage one, fear of punishment would be present, at stage two, certain frustrated desires would be present, and, at stage three, shame, social rejection, or exclusion would be present. Hence, given the emotional states that are present at each of these developmental stages, children cannot develop without experiencing some form of suffering themselves. This point is further emphasized in the work of Prinz,¹²² who—on the basis of further studies performed by Robert Blair—has shown in his studies of psychopathic individuals that the leading explanations of this specific phenomenon are grounded upon a deficit in moral comprehension which is a result of an emotional deficit.¹²³ In this line of evidence, there is a suggestion that psychopaths lack a ‘vicarious distress response’ when others are in need due to a malfunction to their ‘violence-inhibition mechanism’.¹²⁴ Due to this malfunction, psychopaths lack the ability to be sensitive to others in distress, and, more importantly, they are also deficient in fear and sadness. Taken together, as Brady notes, ‘this constitutes a plausible case for the necessity of a wide range of emotions—including fear, distress, and sadness—for a grasp of moral concepts and a capacity to make genuine moral judgements’.¹²⁵ Thus, as these are pre-conditions for the development of various moral virtues, it follows from this that an individual being pained by a moral wrongdoing or a certain disvalue is essential for their development and exercise of the moral capacities that an individual with a moral character would have. Hence, it is thus plausible for one to suppose that suffering is necessary for the development of a moral character along two dimensions: first, the suffering of others is a necessary condition for the existence and exercise of a certain set of moral virtues that make up a moral character—virtues such as compassion, sympathy, empathy, and forgiveness. Second, the suffering of one’s self—in the form of being pained by certain moral wrongs and the needs of other individuals—is a necessary condition for one to develop and exercise their moral capacities, which are fundamental pre-conditions for one having a moral character. Thus, in short, other individuals must suffer for one to be compassionate and forgiving, and they must

120. Kohlberg, *Moral*.

121. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 122.

122. Prinz, *Emotional*.

123. Robert Blair, ‘A Cognitive Developmental Approach to Morality: Investigating the Psychopath’, *Cognition* 57.1 (1995), pp. 1–29.

124. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 123.

125. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 123.

themselves suffer in order for them to respond in a virtuous manner to the various evils of reality. Taking all of these things into account, the existence of suffering is necessary for the development and expression of the virtues and character of courage and morality. In other words, suffering is indeed a necessary condition for the possession of them—and thus, for one to become a heroic and saintly exemplar, one needs to undergo the personally transformative experience that is provided by suffering.

Now, for an individual to transform into an exemplar, positive experiences will certainly play a role—and thus, as noted above, suffering is not sufficient for this transformation. One of these positive experiences could be an activity such as reading an inspirational book (such as a holy text), which could detail, in narrative form, the life of exemplars (such as the life of Jesus). These positive experiences, as noted previously, will enable an individual to focus on emulating these admirable persons and thus work on acquiring their virtues. However, it is plausibly the case, as also noted previously, that negative experiences would need to play a role in the acquisition of these virtues. And, even if they are shown not to be necessary to them, it is plausible that a person would experience *more* of a transformation if they were to undergo the negative experiences that are had by suffering, due to the characteristics of this experience—which are not to be had by positive experiences.¹²⁶ More specifically, as noted previously, the nature of suffering is conceived of here as an experience that includes a sensation and a desire that the sensation not occur. Thus, suffering is not only an unpleasant sensation but is more correctly viewed as an unpleasant experience, given the fact that it includes a desire for a specific sensation to cease. This indicates, as Carel and Kidd note, the ‘first feature of suffering that makes it transformative, namely, that it is an experience’.¹²⁷ As an experience, suffering provides one with new information about what the experience of a particular sensation is like (such as how it is to have the sensations of pain, sadness, grief, despair, extreme fatigue, etc.), whilst also having the desire for this sensation to stop—with the mere having of a sensation without the desire for it to stop not being sufficient to constitute a suffering experience. Now, this accompanying desire for the given sensation to stop points to, as Carel and Kidd note, ‘the *intensity*, *novelty* and *attentional* focus which characterize suffering, each of which concerns deep aspects of what it means to suffer’.¹²⁸ For example, one feels a certain amount of disappointment when one’s favourite football team loses; however, this feeling—though unpleasant—lacks the intensity that is typical of suffering, as is evidenced by the act that one’s mind will move onto the next game to be played the following weekend. Moreover, such disappointment (plausibly) would not be novel—since your favourite team would have lost at some time in the past—in the same way that everyday experiences, according to Carel and Kidd, ‘of bodily health do not prepare one for the feeling of bodily doubt characteristic of chronic somatic illness’.¹²⁹ Experiences of suffering are thus

126. So, if one were to object to the necessity of suffering for acquiring the needed virtues to become an exemplar (as was shown above), this type of experience would play an important role in enabling one to do so. The theodicy being formulated here is thus multi-faceted.

127. Havi Carel and Ian James Kidd, ‘Suffering and Transformative Experience’, in David Bain, Michael Brady and Jennifer Corns (eds.), *The Philosophy of Suffering: Metaphysics, Value, and Normativity* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 174.

128. Carel and Kidd, ‘Suffering’, p. 174, original emphasis.

129. Carel and Kidd, ‘Suffering’, p. 174.

distinguished from other types of experience by their characteristic intensity, novelty, and attentional focus, which, as was previously explained in our explication of its connection to wisdom, can thus help to provide the *motivating factor* to acquire the virtues that are needed to be an exemplar. Following Carel and Kidd,¹³⁰ we can see this to be the case in the example of a serious accident: the intensity and novelty of the experience had by a serious accident would be unlike the previous experiences had by the individual and would (plausibly) radically change their values and goals, such that, as Carel and Kidd note, the ‘structure of one’s experience—of time, social spaces, one’s body—all are transformed in fundamental and irreversible ways: one now suffers chronic back pain; one’s mobility is restricted; one’s sole focus is getting rid of the pain—and so on’.¹³¹ Moreover, the attentional focus had by this experience would be such that one would pay the utmost attention to the accident and the consequences, such that, as Carel and Kidd further write, one would be ‘thinking about it during one’s time in hospital, then again during rehab, then coping with an emerging realisation that the pain will become a permanent feature of one’s life’.¹³²

Now, in addition to the motivation that is provided by a physical suffering experience—such as that of the serious accident—one could also take the suffering had by a *mental* experience to have this motivating factor as well.¹³³ That is, the ‘negative emotions’ that can be produced by admiration of another individual can indeed also produce a suffering experience, as by an individual experiencing a deep admiration for a certain exemplar, this can make one realize that they themselves lack certain attributes (virtues) in some way, and thus feel relatively inferior to the individual that they seek to emulate. One might ask themselves in this situation, ‘Why do they have the ability to be admirable and I not?’ And thus, as Ines Schindler notes, ‘In relation to an admired or adored other, people may perceive themselves as lacking important qualities or skills, inferior to the other, or dependent on the other’s benevolence, which may give rise to feelings of sadness, fear, or shame’.¹³⁴ Hence, the negative emotions that are expressed through the potential feeling of inadequacy (which can produce the further negative feelings of sadness, fear, or shame) can cause pain of some sort—with this pain being classed as a ‘suffering’ by it being an unwanted (or undesired) sensation. The desire for these negative emotions to be removed from oneself, however, can (as with that of a physical suffering experience) provide the needed focus and motivation for one to indeed become admirable. As, plausibly, one could only rid themselves of these specific emotions if they focus, and actually obtain, the attributes (virtues) that are had by the individual that they admire, which would require them to perform the action, as Schindler writes, of continuously putting themselves ‘in the place of the person who upholds an ideal [i.e., the admirable other]’.¹³⁵ That is, the desire to rid oneself of the negative emotions had by one’s feeling of inadequacy would require one to achieve the transformative goal of becoming an

130. Carel and Kidd, ‘Suffering’, pp. 174–75.

131. Carel and Kidd, ‘Suffering’, p. 174.

132. Carel and Kidd, ‘Suffering’, p. 174.

133. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this important issue.

134. Ines Schindler, ‘Relations of Admiration and Adoration with Other Emotions and Well-being’, *Psychology of Well-Being* 4.1 (2014), pp. 1–23 (3).

135. Schindler, ‘Relations’, p. 18, parenthesis added.

exemplar. And it is through *this* potentially continuous and consuming experience of mental suffering that one will be provided, alongside that of a negative physical experience, the required focus and motivation to fulfil this goal.

Yet the manner in which a case of (physical or mental) suffering can, in some way, ‘grab the attention’ of an individual, and divert it away from our more mundane, everyday experience to something else is not to be had by a positive experience. That is because, as Brady writes, ‘painful sensations are not easy to ignore, or rationalize away; pain captures and consumes our attentional resources’.¹³⁶ Thus, as this type of negative experience has the characteristics that cause a person to focus their attention on it and its consequences, and as the acquisition of the necessary virtues for being an exemplar is a possible consequence of this experience, one would have great motivating force available to help them to adapt to the suffering but also acquire the virtues that are produced by it. Suffering is thus something that *captures* and *consumes* the attention of its subject. Thus, as Brady further writes, ‘to say that attention is captured and consumed by emotional objects and events is to say that such objects and events hold sway over us, often making it difficult for us to disengage our attention and shift focus elsewhere’.¹³⁷ An experience of suffering is thus not a brief and unfortunate interruption to a person’s life, but is often something that dominates that life. That is, these types of experiences transform an individual in a deeper way than a positive or voluntary transformative experience, as one has to come to deal with the epistemic, personal, and practical changes that are given by this experience, as well as the involuntary and/or forced nature of it—with positive experiences being less disruptive to a person’s life by them requiring less cognitive and emotional labour to adapt to the circumstances that are given by the experience.¹³⁸ Hence, the ‘attentional persistence’ that is had by an experience of suffering can provide, as noted previously, a motivation for one to undertake the cognitive and emotionally laborious task of *reflecting* on the relevant object of the suffering experience and on the event itself. By one reflecting in such a way, one can determine the appropriate behavioural response to the object or event—which can be that of responding in a virtuous manner, and thus one cultivating the virtuous traits (e.g., wisdom, charity and courage etc.) that are required for one to be an exemplar. Hence, we can take the characteristics that are possessed by a suffering experience (i.e., intensity, novelty, and attentional focus) to be such that they provide a mechanism that enables this type of experience to outperform its feasible competitor—namely, a given positive experience such as the reading of an inspirational book—in its ‘delivery’ of the relevant goals or ends of becoming an exemplar. We can now take this all into account and modify our understanding of the type of world that God would create, which we can illustrate in Figure 4 (where, again, the ‘stick figurine’ represents a human individual (who is an exemplar of goodness), ‘G’ stands for goodness (i.e., the concepts of morality), the ‘non-dashed arrows’ represent the direction in which morality (i.e., goodness) is grounded, and the ‘dashed arrows’ represent the necessary and motivating connection between suffering and a human individual).

Suffering is thus taken here to have a fundamental role to play in a ‘good world’ by it being a necessary and motivating factor in making a mere human individual into an exemplar of

136. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 73.

137. Brady, *Suffering*, p. 130.

138. Carel and Kidd, ‘Suffering’.

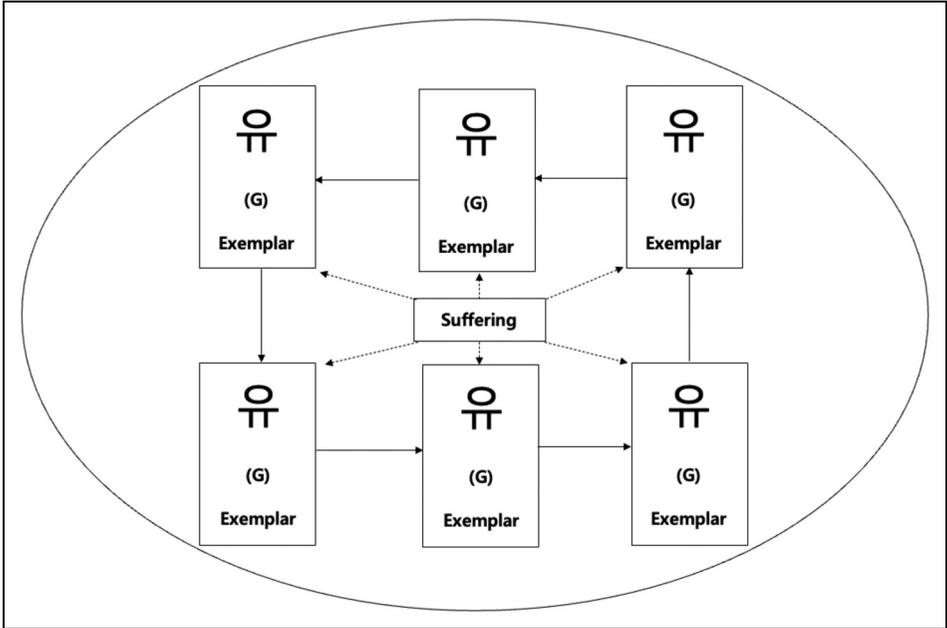


Figure 4. System of Morality in a Good World (iii).

goodness—which could possibly be achieved in combination with the reading of narratives of other admirable lives, or by that individual encountering other admirable persons whom they can emulate.¹³⁹ That is, in taking everything into account, suffering is thus, first, a necessary condition for one to undergo a transformative experience that enables one to become an exemplar and, second, it serves as the motivating force—alongside the positive experiences of the individual—that can enable one to complete this process. We can thus finally construe the greater good that is produced by an experience of suffering as follows:

-
- (9) (Exemplar Greater Good) The transformation of an individual into an exemplar is a greater good, if and only if:
- (i) Allowing a human to suffer is the only morally permissible way in which God can provide an opportunity for them to transform into an exemplar.
 - (ii) The expected value of allowing the experience of suffering, given the opportunity for them to transform into an exemplar, is positive.
-

139. I use the term ‘possibly’ here, as an individual, through their suffering experience alone, might become admirable without, however, having read or encountered in real life any other admirable persons in whom they could emulate.

So, in answer to our question of why God allows individuals to suffer? One can answer that he does so in order to allow the existence of a greater good to obtain—with this greater good being the opportunity for a particular individual to transform (epistemically and personally) into an exemplar—which allows them to now fulfil a role of great responsibility—namely, that of grounding morality and 'creatively flourishing' by partaking in God's creative activity of making our world into a good world.¹⁴⁰ One can now ask the question whether, given the understanding of a greater good detailed above, is the second condition—that of the experienced value of the good state of affairs being positive, in light of the actual severity of the suffering that must be endured for one to obtain this good—met as well? It seems at first sight that it is not, and thus this approach does not put forward a greater good that does justify God in allowing individuals to experience suffering. It will be important to now turn our attention to detailing two objections that further emphasize this point, with one of these objections requiring a further precisification of the theodicy that has been formulated thus far.

Compensated Suffering

Suffering serves the role of enabling people to transform into exemplars and thus plays an important role in furthering God's creative activity in our world. Yet, one may say that, despite the good ends that suffering has been shown to serve, there is too much suffering in the world, and that less suffering could produce the same benefit—namely, the conditions necessary for an epistemic and personal transformation of an individual into an exemplar. For this, it might be said that God could enable an individual to acquire the necessary virtues to be an exemplar—such as wisdom, charity, and courage—by only inflicting a small amount of suffering upon them—such as one battling a small bout of depression or a non-terminal illness or injury. But no God ought to have allowed the suffering that stems from chronic illness, a serious life-changing accident, or the event of the Holocaust. There is too much suffering in our world to warrant the greater good that can come from it, and thus the second comparative condition for a greater good is not met—the expected value of allowing the experience of suffering, given the good state of affairs, is *not* positive. Let us term this issue the *Severity Objection*.¹⁴¹

In reflecting on this objection,¹⁴² though persuasive at first sight, one can see that the Exemplarist Theodicy does not—unlike other theodicies—falter on this point. And this is for two reasons: first, suffering is taken in this theodicy to provide the necessary

140. For ease of writing, from now on the term 'creatively flourishing' (or 'creative flourishing') will now drop out and be implicitly assumed in the phrase 'making the world (into) a good world'.

141. The following response to the Severity Objection is modelled on a similar response provided by Swinburne, *God*, pp. 263–64.

142. The success of the following response to the Severity Objection does not mean, however, that one is being encouraged to seek out suffering in order to become an exemplar. Rather, it is only emphasizing the fact that the disposition of an individual should simply be that of being open to accepting the reality of suffering and the benefits that it can bring if, and when, one is subjected to it.

conditions for one to become an exemplar but also provides—through having the characteristics of intensity, novelty, and attentional focus—the needed motivating factor to allow someone to complete this process. Hence, if a suffering experience is to fulfil the latter role and motivate one to become an exemplar (by helping to focus the individual's attention on acquiring the necessary virtues), the more severe the suffering, the more the intensity, novelty, and attentional focus would be experienced by the individual, which would result in a greater motivation than if this suffering experience was less. Thus, in other words, the more severe the suffering endured, the greater the motivating force that would underwrite a person's transformation into an exemplar—and so the less severe the suffering, the less motivating force that is available. Hence, as God desires for one to undergo this transformation, it is plausible that he would seek the most efficient means for doing so—and suffering and its motivating characteristics, as noted previously, are that specific means. Second, one could also say that the more severe the suffering that is endured by an individual, the greater the amount of admirability that an individual would have. Now, this itself can be understood in two ways: firstly, as that of the greater amount of suffering providing a greater degree of possession of the necessary virtues—that is, more wisdom, more courage, and more charity. Thus, if one was to lessen the amount of suffering experienced by an individual, then there would be a corresponding loss of the degree that one possesses the necessary virtues that make one admirable. Secondly, this can also be understood as that of the greater the amount of suffering endured by an individual results in a greater degree of admiration being shown to this individual by others. That is, one would plausibly admire an individual more if they have endured the disruptive force of suffering and did *not* become a 'worse' person—by undergoing a negative epistemic and (more importantly) personal transformation—but, rather, in this suffering, one stood firm through it and, instead, solely underwent a positive epistemic and personal transformation that made them into a 'better' person. Now, as the more admiration that one has for another person, the greater the motivation is had to emulate them, then the severity of suffering would seem to play a role, again, in helping to motivate individuals to become an exemplar—though in this case, this would be on the basis of emulation. In other words, we admire, after a period of conscientious reflection, those who have not been mentally broken down by suffering but have sought to overcome it. However, if suffering was not so severe, then the degree of admiration had by one would be less, and thus there would be less motivation to emulate that individual and further the good by becoming an exemplar. Thus, if there is a God, who desires for one to become an exemplar, it is again plausible that he would seek to permit severe suffering in order to allow a greater possession of the virtues that are necessary for being an exemplar *and* a greater increase in the admirability of the exemplar—which would also increase the motivation for others to emulate them. Therefore, the Severity Objection is not successful against the Exemplarist Theodicy, as the good that is produced by allowing severe suffering—namely, that of one transforming into an exemplar, and the furthering God's creative activity by this transformation—is not outweighed by the amount of suffering that is allowed—as the lessening of the severity of suffering experienced would also result in a lessening of the chance that one would become an exemplar (or be of much 'imitable worth') and thus also further God's creative goals. Yet, as the fulfilment of this creative

goal is an inevitable result of God's nature—given the Diffusiveness Principle—then it is such that God would not lessen the severity of suffering that an exemplar in-training is experiencing. The severity of suffering thus does not undermine the goodness of the goal of being transformed into an exemplar.

Yet, despite the conclusion that can be reached here, we have a more pertinent issue that can be raised at this point—and will thus lead to a further precisification of the Exemplarist Theodicy—as it seems clear that there are some instances of suffering that occur daily and in great plenitude in our world that do *not* seem to serve the purpose of enabling individuals to transform into exemplars—let us term this issue the *Gratuitous Objection*. One example of this is a case in which an individual, who experiences severe suffering, responds to this suffering by becoming a morally deplorable (i.e., non-admirable) individual rather than that of a moral exemplar. Thus, in this type of case, one can ask the question of why God would let this individual experience suffering, knowing that it will have this negative result rather than serving the positive purpose of enabling them to become an exemplar? In answer to this question, one could say that what is required for suffering to be justified is solely the provision of an *opportunity* to transform into an exemplar—and not so much that of this state of affairs *being actualized*. And this seems to be necessary for the provision of the further valuable good of God providing individuals with the ability to *acquire* the necessary virtues for being an exemplar, which would not be had if they were forced into it. Hence, the provision of opportunity *might* be all that is necessary to warrant the existence of suffering (even of a severe form). However, in turning our attention to other types of examples, one could ask the further question of what good is there in God allowing individuals to suffer that could *never* undergo the process of transforming into an exemplar through their experience of suffering? That is, it is plausibly the case that only a certain range of individuals can undergo the process of transforming into an exemplar—namely, mentally fully functional human adults and *some* mentally fully functional human children—let us term this class of individuals 'exemplary sufferers'. The types of individuals that would not fall within this range would be all the myriad of other sentient creatures—such as non-mentally fully functional human adults, young (and/or non-mentally fully functional) human children, and all the different types of animals—let us term this class of individuals 'non-exemplary sufferers'. Non-exemplary sufferers are the type of individuals that *cannot* respond to suffering positively in such a manner as to acquire the virtues of courage, moral character, and wisdom that would enable them to transform into an exemplar—and thus play a role in making our world into a good world (due to them lacking the necessary mental capabilities to do so). More precisely, non-exemplary sufferers undergo experiences of severe suffering on a wide and frequent basis in our world; yet, as these beings (plausibly) cannot serve the role of being exemplars, their suffering seems to not serve any good purpose at all. This can be seen by focusing on two (in)famous cases provided by William Rowe: the *case of Bambi* and the *case of Sue*—where each of the individuals involved and their experiences of suffering are paradigm examples of non-exemplary suffering.¹⁴³

143. William Rowe, 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16.4 (1979), pp. 335–41; William Rowe, 'Evil and Theodicy', *Philosophical Topics* 16.2 (1988), pp. 119–32.

These two cases, as stated by Rowe,¹⁴⁴ can be understood as follows (with the first case being fictional and the second case being an actual event introduced by Bruce Russell,¹⁴⁵ whose account of it is drawn from a report in the *Detroit Free Press* of 3 January 1986):

The Case of Bambi

'In some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering.'

The Case of Sue

The girl's mother was living with her boyfriend, another man who was unemployed, her two children, and her 9-month-old infant fathered by the boyfriend. On New Year's Eve all three adults were drinking at a bar near the woman's home. The boyfriend had been taking drugs and drinking heavily. He was asked to leave the bar at 8:00 p.m. After several reappearances he finally stayed away for good at about 9:30 p.m. The woman and the unemployed man remained at the bar until 2:00 a.m. at which time the woman went home and the man to a party at a neighbor's home. Perhaps out of jealousy, the boyfriend attacked the woman when she walked into the house. Her brother was there and broke up the fight by hitting the boyfriend who was passed out and slumped over a table when the brother left. Later the boyfriend attacked the woman again, and this time she knocked him unconscious. After checking the children, she went to bed. Later the woman's 5-year-old girl Sue went downstairs to go to the bathroom. The unemployed man returned from the party at 3:45 a.m. and found the 5-year-old dead. She had been raped, severely beaten over most of her body and strangled to death by the boyfriend.

Now, in the case of Bambi—unlike exemplary sufferers—the type of sentient creature featured in this case: fawns, are not moral agents, and so the fawn's severe suffering could not provide them with an opportunity to acquire the needed virtues that would transform them into an exemplar. Furthermore, in the case of Sue, the opportunity provided by the (terrible) suffering experienced by Sue, in order for her to become an exemplar could indeed have been had by her undergoing a *less severe* experience—that is, the particular

144. Rowe, 'Some Varieties of Atheism', p. 337; Rowe, 'Theodicy', p. 120.

145. Bruce Russell, 'The Persistent Problem of Evil', *Faith and Philosophy* 6.2 (1989), pp. 121–39 (123).

suffering that she underwent was indeed *not necessary* for her to become an exemplar—as her having a different suffering experience would indeed still provide her with an opportunity to acquire the virtues necessary for being admirable.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, the experience that she did undergo did not serve this role anyway, given the fact of her death during the suffering experience, which thus resulted in her experience of suffering not providing her with the opportunity and time needed to undergo the needed transformation. Hence, one can ask the question that: if, in both of these cases, the individuals under question experienced some suffering that did not (or could not) provide them with the opportunity to become an exemplar, then why did God permit it when he could have instead prevented it? Thus, suppose, following Rowe, that by the term *gratuitous suffering experience*, we mean a suffering experience ‘that God (if he exists) could have prevented without thereby losing an outweighing good or having to permit an evil [suffering experience] equally bad or worse’.¹⁴⁷ So the question to be faced here is: within our exemplarist framework, are the suffering experiences of the fawn’s and Sue’s gratuitous? In answer to this question, we can clearly see that, as the fawn’s terrible suffering over five days, and Sue’s horrific beating, rape, and strangulation, do not (or cannot) provide them with the opportunity to transform into an exemplar—or at least are not necessary for the occurrence of this opportunity—they do *seem* to be gratuitous. And thus, now, at a more general level, as the cases of Bambi and Sue are best viewed as representative of cases of a particular class of suffering that pose a specific problem to the Exemplarist Theodicy—namely, that of non-exemplary suffering—even though this theodicy provides a justification for the suffering of exemplary sufferers, experiences of suffering for *these* type of sentient beings—non-exemplary sufferers—*seem* to be gratuitous. In other words, the occurrence of these types of suffering experiences are such that God (if he exists) could have prevented it without thereby losing the opportunity for these individuals to transform into exemplars—due to the fact that these types of beings cannot undergo this type of transformation. Hence, if the Exemplarist Theodicy is, in fact, true, it is only applicable to a (very) limited range of beings, and thus, given this limitation, one has not provided a morally sufficient reason for why he allows *most* individuals to suffer. In short, on the basis of the theodicy formulated here, God is not justified in allowing the suffering in our world—and thus, one cannot hold consistently, with the common view of suffering in the world, that there is an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God. We can thus provide a helpful illustration in Figure 5 of the conclusion that has now been reached concerning the formulation of our theodicy.

146. The necessity of suffering in order to become an exemplar is important if the latter is to be conceived of as a greater good that exists as necessitated by an experience of suffering. Hence, if individuals (including those of exemplary sufferers as well) could have become exemplars without suffering, then their suffering would not be justified. Thus, the compensatory aspect of the Exemplarist Theodicy that will be introduced below will also apply to these types of individuals as well.

147. William Rowe, ‘Friendly Atheism, Skeptical Theism, and the Problem of Evil’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 59.2 (2006), pp. 79–92 (79), parenthesis added.

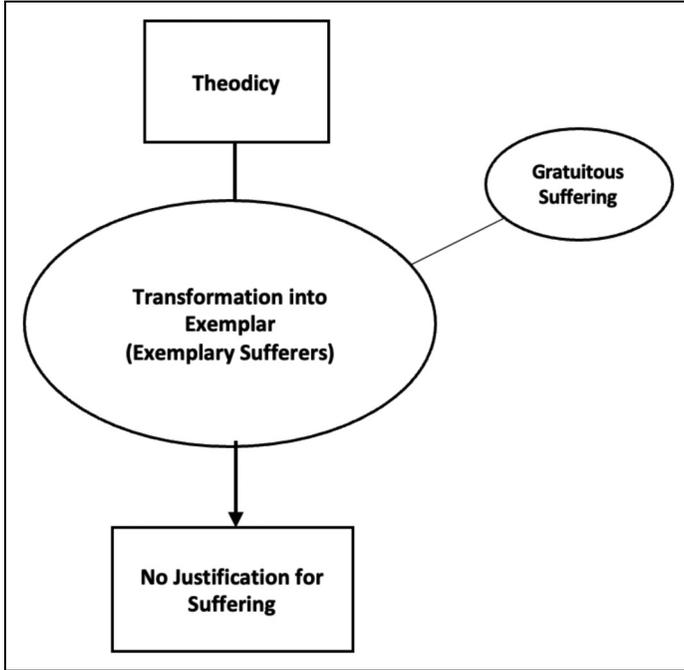


Figure 5. Theodicy Construction (i).

The important question now to be faced is: is there a way for one to provide a further justification of the suffering of non-exemplary sufferers within this specific framework—so as to salvage our theodicy? I believe that there is, by first, emphasizing the fact that the *primary* reason why God allows suffering to exist within our world is indeed so that a certain class of individuals (i.e., exemplary sufferers) can be provided with the opportunity to transform into exemplars. Thus, why God then allows the other class of individuals to suffer (i.e., non-exemplary sufferers) is in order for *this* goal to be fulfilled—which would be realized by the experiences of suffering of non-exemplary sufferers *providing others* with the opportunity to transform into exemplars. That is, by an exemplary sufferer directly engaging with, or encountering, a non-exemplary sufferer in their daily life (that is, experiencing suffering that will not ultimately lead to their own transformation)—or, by them learning about a more geographically or historically distant case (such as the paradigm cases of Bambi and Sue)—they will have the opportunity to pursue the path of, firstly, acquiring the virtue of courage (e.g., by them courageously seeking to find the solution to their problem, or to generally eradicate this type of suffering—such as, for the cases of Sue and Bambi, that of campaigning for stringent laws against child abusers and also seeking to actively improve the environment for animal life). Secondly, they will have the opportunity of acquiring a moral character (e.g., by them showing compassion or empathy towards the individual (or patience to endure their

suffering with them)—or in the cases of Sue and Bambi showing empathy and compassion towards the individuals involved in these cases, and directly showing this towards other children and animals that are currently suffering in a similar way). And, thirdly, they will have the opportunity of acquiring the virtue of wisdom (e.g., by them exercising their reflective abilities in thinking of ways to help the sufferer to cope or overcome their suffering, or ways in which this type of suffering could be generally eradicated—such as, for the cases of Sue and Bambi, that of thinking up effective campaigning strategies to help to effectively punish child abusers and eradicate animal suffering). Hence, if it was indeed the case that other sentient creatures did *not* undergo these experiences of suffering, then exemplary sufferers would themselves not have the opportunities to acquire the necessary virtues of admirability that will enable them to become exemplars. All sufferers are thus of *use* to God in providing these opportunities for others—and thus, every individual’s suffering is not gratuitous—as it either serves the purpose of providing an opportunity to transform into an exemplar, which would be had by exemplary sufferers, or it enables one to be the means by which other individuals can have the opportunity to undergo this transformation, which would be had by non-exemplary sufferers. Yet, in saying this, however, it does also seem to be the case that the suffering had by non-exemplary sufferers, which produces the goodness of *being of use* in this specific way, does not seem to be a *greater* good; that is, one where the expected value of God allowing these non-exemplary sufferers—who will not (or cannot) transform into exemplars—to experience suffering (in order to provide others with the opportunity for others to do so) is not positive,¹⁴⁸ which is clearly the case in our representative examples of the cases of Bambi and Sue.¹⁴⁹ And this is indeed correct, given the plausibility that individuals (of all kinds) should not be *used* as a means (to provide others with a certain opportunity) to an end (of those others becoming exemplars). Hence, if God did, in fact, prevent suffering of this kind (and severity), he would not have been prevented from losing an *outweighing* good. Thus, the reason provided here for God’s permittance of the various sufferings experienced by non-exemplary sufferers does not seem to be a morally sufficient reason that provides a justification for him doing so. So, we can thus illustrate in Figure 6 the conclusion now reached here concerning the formulation of our theodicy.

148. Swinburne, *Providence*, utilizes the goodness of being of use in the context of a sufferer being of use for another to exercise their responsible free will. However, here I take the goodness of being of use to be best understood as a sufferer being of use for another in providing them with an opportunity to transform into an exemplar (by acquiring the necessary virtues for doing this). Moreover, unlike Swinburne, I do *not* take the goodness of being of use as being a morally sufficient reason for God allowing suffering to occur.

149. As the cases of Bambi and Sue are taken here to simply be paradigm representatives of the class of non-exemplary sufferers—and as the focus of this article is not to directly address the formal ‘evidential argument from evil’ provided by Rowe, ‘Some Varieties of Atheism’ and ‘Theodicy’—these cases will not be regularly referred to. Rather, the general class of non-exemplary sufferers will be our main focus; however, at times, these examples will be brought into the discussion to emphasize a point.

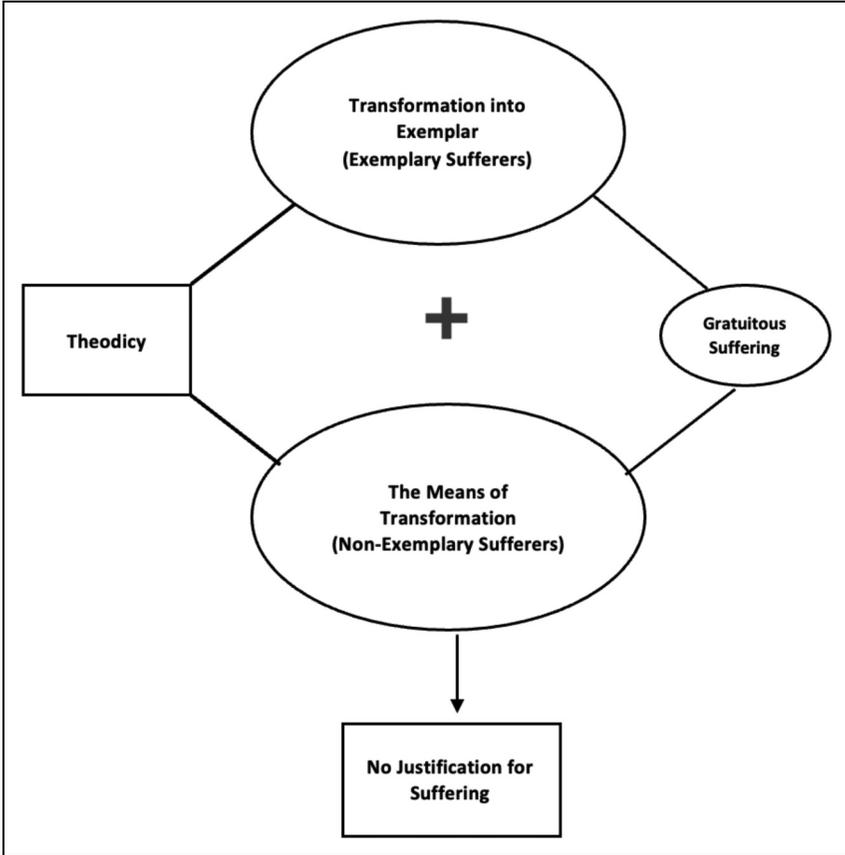


Figure 6. Theodicy Construction (ii).

Thus, given the position reached here, the question now is: how is one to deal with this problem without rejecting the theodicy that has been formulated here? One way in which this issue can be dealt with is by viewing God as not being justified in his permittance of suffering for the stated reasons—even though they are taken to be *the* (possible) reasons for him permitting this suffering—but, instead, the justification of this action being provided by him also seeking to provide *compensation* to all of the non-exemplary sufferers. More precisely, at a general level, the term ‘compensation’, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is defined as ‘something that counterbalances or makes up for an undesirable or unwelcome state of affairs’. Hence, for something to thus fulfil the role of being a form of compensation, the value of the compensation must thus outweigh that of the negative value of the negative state of affairs. Thus, in following Adams,¹⁵⁰

150. Marilyn McCord Adams, ‘Ignorance, Instrumentality, Compensation, and the Problem of Evil’, *Sophia* 52 (2013), pp. 7–26 (17).

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- (10) (Compensation) An individual x , in permitting (or causing) a suffering experience E that is bad for another agent y , in order to produce a good G , can still be justified in permitting E by x 'making it up' to y , by giving them an appropriate access to a good G that compensates Y for the harm suffered because of E .
-

we can understand the 'logic of compensation' in play here, within our specific context as follows:

According to the logic of compensation, one can still be good to someone by them being compensated for the bad things that they have been allowed to endure. For example, as noted by Adams,¹⁵¹ parents might decide to relocate their family to a foreign country in which their children are going to experience certain difficulties (such as having to live in poor conditions or attend a school where they have to leave their friends behind and do not 'fit in'). The parents might have chosen to relocate to this area for good reasons (such as them starting a new job that helps the needy), yet that good might not be *sufficient* to justify the suffering that their children might endure. Hence, for the parents to be overall justified in making this move, they can seek to 'make it up' to their children by compensating them in various ways (for example, by spending extra time with them or going on special trips with them). In an analogous fashion to this, God can be taken to be a being who compensates non-exemplary sufferers. That is, God might allow various non-exemplary sufferers to experience suffering for certain goods to come about—such as the good of other individuals having opportunities to become exemplars. However, these goods do not justify these suffering experiences, so, because of this, God compensates sufferers by a different good. However, one can now ask the important question of what this good is?

A plausible good (or, in fact, may be the only good) that is great enough to compensate a non-exemplary sufferer for their experience of suffering is the *infinite and incommensurate good that God is himself*.¹⁵² That is, an enduring intimate and appreciative *personal relationship* with God is an immeasurable good for created individuals. Hence, as Adams notes, 'the only way to make good on individual horror participation [or general experience of suffering] is to weave that experience up into the individual's on the whole and in the end a beatific personal relationship with God'.¹⁵³ Moreover, as relations to good (e.g., exemplary) individuals—even if they are not incommensurately good themselves—is itself a good, then it is plausibly the case that an individual standing in a personal relationship with other good individuals

151. Adams, 'Ignorance', p. 18.

152. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

153. Adams, 'Ignorance', p. 19. The point raised here by Adams is in the context of her notion of 'horror participation'; however, this type of suffering seems to fall into the wider category of the types of suffering experiences that non-exemplary sufferers like Bambi and Sue have experienced, and thus this point is also relevant to these cases as well.

would be of great intrinsic value as well. Hence, we can take it to be so that beatific intimacy with, and appreciation from, God and other good individuals is a good of a great intrinsic value for non-exemplary sufferers, and thus is the needed thing to compensate these types of individuals. The question now to be faced is thus: how will God provide this compensation? One possible way is through God producing certain *connections* between God, exemplary sufferers, and each non-exemplary sufferer that will then be an ongoing reality and the basis of their relationship. More precisely, a connection—as understood here and as noted by Robin Collins—is a special type of relation that holds between persons (and non-human creation) that is a result of a significant past interaction.¹⁵⁴ The basis for postulating such connections at a general level, according to Collins,¹⁵⁵ is due to the fact that.

people commonly experience their relations with other persons, or even parts of non-human creation, as both profoundly important and as being in some way deeply significant to what they are as human beings. Further, the loss of one of these relations is often experienced as a loss of an aspect of one's self. For example, the loss of a loved one—particularly a spouse—is often experienced as a loss of some part of one's own self.

Thus, it is plausibly the case that the notion of a connection presupposes the view of the self as partly constituted by its relations to other entities—where some relations can be a deeper part of the self than others and, as Collins further notes, ‘one can be more or less connected with another person or entity ... [which] in turn presupposes that the self does not have definite boundaries’.¹⁵⁶ Connections between persons and non-human sentient life seem to thus be an inherent feature of reality, with three types of connections, according to Collins,¹⁵⁷ being of great value in our world: *connections of appreciation*, *connections of contribution*, and *connections of intimacy* (hereafter, ACI connections). Now, in unpacking the nature of these connections within our specific context, we will proceed by focusing first on connections of intimacy, then appreciation, and then finally that of contribution. Thus, first, the connection of intimacy can occur between two individuals in cases where the sharing of an experience between them is such that, as Collins writes, each now ‘becomes a “part” of the other's life’.¹⁵⁸ This connection is thus formed when one (or both individuals) participate in the life of the other—with the value of this relation of intimacy thus greatly increased when it exists as an ongoing reality in the life of both individuals—through an ongoing conscious awareness of the acts that produced these connections—rather than that of them simply being a past fact about those

154. Robin Collins, ‘Divine Action and Evolution’, in Thomas P. Flint and Michael Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 241–61; Robin Collins, ‘The Connection Building Theodicy’, in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Justin P. McBrayer (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 222–35.

155. Collins, ‘Divine’, p. 248.

156. Collins, ‘Divine’, p. 248, parenthesis added.

157. Collins, ‘Connection’.

158. Collins, ‘Connection’, p. 223.

individuals.¹⁵⁹ Second, the connection of appreciation occurs when an individual appreciates and shows gratitude towards another individual because of what they have done for them. This type of connection, according to Collins, ‘is never complete since we cannot be fully aware of another’s contribution to our lives’.¹⁶⁰ Yet it is plausible for one to assume that—if there is a next life—one will be able to become aware of these contributions. Thus, for example, if an individual self-sacrificially helps another individual in a time of need, the awareness that the former individual gains of this in the next life will enable them to have an ongoing appreciation of this act of self-sacrifice made by the latter individual.¹⁶¹ Third, the connection of contribution occurs whenever an individual provides a significant contribution to the well-being of another individual. Individuals frequently feel satisfied from having contributed to the welfare of others, which often goes beyond the value of the contribution itself to include the perceived value of having been the means by which this contribution occurred. That is, as Collins writes, individuals regularly come to think that ‘their life was worthwhile even if they endured more suffering than happiness’.¹⁶² The value of this type of connection does not end with the actual act of contribution, but is one that is an ongoing reality in the life of an individual based on the fact that one will eventually become fully aware of our contributions to other individuals.¹⁶³ Thus, there are circumstances when certain valuable connections—connections of ACI—are formed between individuals.

One can now ask, in our specific context, how would connections of ACI (that are an ongoing reality in the lives of the individuals involved) form between non-exemplary sufferers, God, and other exemplary sufferers? And how can the production of these connections serve as compensation for the former’s suffering? For the formation of a connection of intimacy, this connection will be one that holds between exemplary sufferers and non-exemplary sufferers, *and* between God and each non-exemplary sufferer. How we can see this to be the case is by now turning our attention back to the work of Zagzebski and her conceptualization of the notions of *empathy* and *total empathy*.¹⁶⁴ First, for the formation of a connection of intimacy between exemplary sufferers and non-exemplary sufferers—which is grounded on an empathetic action being performed by the former in relation to the latter—the notion of empathy, according to Zagzebski,¹⁶⁵ is best understood as expressing the state of affairs when an individual imagines what it would be like to be

159. Collins, ‘Connection’.

160. Collins, ‘Connection’, p. 223.

161. Collins, ‘Connection’.

162. Collins, ‘Connection’, p. 223.

163. Collins, ‘Connection’.

164. Linda Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity: A Defense of a Divine Attribute* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2013). In her work on this issue, Zagzebski terms total empathy ‘omnisubjectivity’; however, due to the need to further break down the meaning of the latter term, and the lack of space to do so, I will proceed with the use of the term ‘total empathy’. Furthermore, a brief explanation of the nature of empathy was stated in the previous sections. The present re-statement seeks to be in line with this.

165. Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*, pp. 25–26.

another person (i.e., they take on that person's perspective and emotional states). More precisely, empathy is a particular state of an individual that enables them to acquire an emotion that is like that of an individual. When an individual x empathizes with another individual y 's sadness, x becomes conscious of y 's sadness and acquires an emotion like that of y in the process of taking on their perspective—namely, imagining what it would be like to be y in their situation, in the manner in which they are experiencing it.¹⁶⁶ Importantly, x 's sadness is not identical to the sadness of y 's; rather, x 's emotion is *consciously representational*—whereas y 's emotion is not—such that x 's psychic state includes their attempt at copying y 's emotion *as if* from their first-person perspective—however, it also includes their own ego, given the fact that an empathic state, as Zagzebski further notes, 'always includes something not included in the state of the person with whom she is empathizing'.¹⁶⁷ Thus, when an individual feels empathy towards another individual, they share in the experience of this individual—as if it was happening to them—without, however, losing their individuality in this shared experience.

On the basis of this, we can thus posit the fact of a certain number of exemplary sufferers having empathized with the suffering of the non-exemplary sufferers—in the manner that the emotions that were felt by the non-exemplary sufferers during their experience (such as that of the emotions of sadness, despair, anxiety etc.) have been taken on by the exemplary sufferers—which would be had by them imagining what it would be like to be in their situation (resulting in the production of a copy of the emotions that the sufferer was feeling during that experience and a first-person perspective on the experience). This empathetic action could be realized by *direct experience* by a given exemplary sufferer directly engaging or encountering a non-exemplary sufferer in their daily life who is experiencing suffering (such as that of a mother and father with their sick child etc.), and so they feel empathy towards them. Or, it could be realized through *indirect experience* by them learning of a more geographically or historically distant case (such as that of the cases of Bambi and Sue), and then, subsequent to gaining knowledge about this, their feeling of empathy towards these sufferers. In both of these ways, directly and indirectly, the exemplary sufferer would imagine what it would be like to be in the experiential situation that the non-exemplary sufferer is in—and by doing this, they would produce a copy of the emotions that the sufferer was feeling during that experience, and provide a first-person perspective on the experience. Exemplary sufferers, through their empathy with the non-exemplary sufferers (via direct or indirect experience of them), would thus—at least partially—share in the suffering of these individuals and thus have some form of intimate acquaintance with the non-exemplary sufferers that they have empathized with.¹⁶⁸ Hence, on the basis of this sharing of experience

166. Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*.

167. Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*, p. 29.

168. It is important to highlight that, as stated in the main text, it is a *certain number* and *not* all exemplary sufferers that will exemplify the virtue of empathy in this type of circumstance *in this life*. Now, why it is not all is due to the fact that the admirability that is needed for one to be an exemplary sufferer is relative to the specific virtue in which they are admirable for exemplifying (thus, it could be the case that a very brave firefighter, who risks their life to save others in a burning building and is subsequently severely injured, is admirable based on their exemplification of the virtue of courage (and thus is 'heroic'). However, this

that would be had between exemplary sufferers and certain non-exemplary sufferers, there would be a connection of intimacy that is formed between them.

Second, for the formation of a connection of intimacy between God and non-exemplary sufferers—which is grounded on a perfect and total empathetic action being performed by the former in relation to the latter—the notion of *total* empathy, according to Zagzebski,¹⁶⁹ is an expanded form of empathy that includes further conscious states. That is, total empathy is the cognitive state, as Zagzebski notes, of empathizing ‘with every one of a person’s conscious states throughout that person’s entire life—every thought, belief, sensation, mood, desire, and choice, as well as every emotion’.¹⁷⁰ Hence, *perfect* total empathy is the complete and accurate representation of all of another individual’s conscious states, as Zagzebski further writes, ‘if A has perfect total empathy with B, then, whenever B is in a conscious state C, A acquires a state that is a perfectly accurate copy of C and A is aware that her conscious state is a copy of C’.¹⁷¹ If an individual has perfect total empathy for another individual in this particular way, then the former individual is able to grasp *what it is like* for the latter individual to be in that specific state. Yet, because the individual is in an empathetic state, their awareness of their individuality will be included in their empathetic state.¹⁷² Furthermore, the individual would always have an awareness that their empathetic copy *is a copy*—that their empathetic copy of the individual’s state is not the state of being that individual. Given all of this, it is thus plausible to take God (if he exists) to be a *cognitively perfect* being, and thus one would be a being who has total perfect empathy with *all* conscious beings who have ever existed (or will ever exist).¹⁷³ In short, it is a plausible assumption to take God to be an entity that possesses the attribute of being *totally empathetic*—with the nature of this form of empathy being a direct acquaintance with the conscious states of all of God’s creatures—a form of direct ‘seeing’, yet without there being any physical difference between God and his creatures.¹⁷⁴ As a totally empathetic being, God thus lives through the conscious experience of each being who possesses consciousness. That is, as Zagzebski writes, ‘He knows everything you know or understand from living your life, and similarly for every other conscious being, he knows what it is like to be you, what it is like to be your dog, and what it is like to be each and every animal that has ever lived and had conscious awareness’.¹⁷⁵ In other words, God experiences everything we experience by living our life—that is, God grasps it as if it were from their first-person

individual might not be admirable for their exemplification of the moral virtues that would include that of showing empathy towards others who they saved, as he/she might have done this as an act of duty. Nevertheless, even though it is a certain number that have been empathetic in this life, in the afterlife, *all* exemplary sufferers will be able to show the needed empathy there. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for their feedback on this point.

169. Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*.

170. Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*, p. 29.

171. Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*, p. 29.

172. Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*.

173. Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*.

174. Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*.

point of view—yet, in an empathetic way, such that God does not ‘forget’ that he is not that individual. Thus, God feels total empathy towards another individual; he shares in the total conscious experience of this individual—as if it was happening to him—without, however, him losing his own identity in this shared experience.

Thus, given the fact that God, as a totally empathetic being, experiences all of the experiences of every conscious being, God will thus totally empathize with the suffering of the non-exemplary sufferers—in the manner that all of the cognitive states (such as that of the thoughts, beliefs, desires, and emotions) had by the non-exemplary sufferers during their entire life—which would thus include their suffering experiences—have been taken on by God—with this being done by God by him having imagined what it would be like to be in their situation (leading to the production of a copy of all of the cognitive states that the sufferer had during that experience and a first-person perspective on the experience). This empathetic action would be realized by *direct* and *first-person experience*, where God would (fully) share in the suffering experiences of all conscious beings by living through this experience with them—living through the mother’s mental suffering and the child’s physical suffering, and living through the suffering had by Bambi and Sue—as if it was him experiencing this suffering. God would thus have an intimate acquaintance with all non-exemplary (and exemplary) sufferers in a manner that their suffering will be encompassed in the life of God. Thus, on the basis of the shared experience that is had between God (through his total empathy) and non-exemplary sufferers, there would plausibly be a connection of intimacy that is formed between them.

Now, for the formation of connections of appreciation and contribution, these connections will, again, be formed between each non-exemplary sufferer and God, on the basis of God’s appreciation for each non-exemplary sufferer being of use to him in making his world a good world—through their experience of suffering providing others with the opportunity to transform into exemplars who can then make the world into a good world. Moreover, these connections of appreciation and contribution will also, again, be formed between each non-exemplary sufferer and each (successful) exemplary sufferer,¹⁷⁶ on the basis of the latter’s appreciation for the particular non-exemplary sufferer that provided them with the opportunity to transform into an exemplar—and thus help to make the world into a good world. Thus, in both of these scenarios, it is plausible that divine and human gratitude will be shown towards each non-exemplary sufferer for their suffering. More precisely, for each and every case of suffering experienced by a non-exemplary sufferer, an intimate expression of divine and human appreciation will be provided by God, and the exemplary sufferers, to these individuals because of the experience that they have endured (voluntarily or involuntarily) having played an important role in furthering God’s plan for the world

176. ‘Successful’ in the sense that these individuals successfully transformed into exemplars, and thus it is plausible that God would seek to also preserve them in existence after their death (this is not to say, however, that those who are unsuccessful will not also be preserved as well—it is just that one can have more confidence that God would seek to preserve each of the exemplars than those who have failed to be exemplary!)

—which will merit divine gratitude— and helping individuals to become good—which will merit human gratitude. There would thus be an appreciation of each non-exemplary sufferer that will be shown by God and other exemplary sufferers. Moreover, by each of the non-exemplary sufferers' experiences having made a significant contribution to the moral betterment of (God's) world and the well-being of other (exemplary) individuals, the recognition of this by God, and other exemplary sufferers, of the contribution that has been provided by these individuals, will provide these non-exemplary sufferers with the satisfaction of having contributed to the welfare of others *globally*—by (indirectly) contributing to making the world a good world—and *locally*—by providing others with the opportunity to transform into exemplars—each of which will go beyond the value of the contribution itself to include the perceived value of having been the means by which these contributions occurred. Hence, in addition to the production of connections of intimacy, there will also be connections of appreciation and contribution that have been produced between God, exemplary sufferers, and each of the non-exemplary sufferers. Importantly, however, the ACI connections that have been formed here, and which establish a close relationship between God, exemplary sufferers, and all non-exemplary sufferers, would need to exist as an *ongoing reality* in the life of all of these individuals—and thus would not simply be a past fact about God and the exemplary sufferers having shared in the suffering of these individuals, and appreciated the contribution made by them. More precisely, for the connection of intimacy, as (some) exemplary sufferers have empathized with (some) non-exemplary sufferers, and God has totally empathized with (or, more specifically, lived the life of) each and every non-exemplary sufferer—resulting in God and the exemplary sufferers having (either partially or fully) shared in the suffering experienced by the non-exemplary sufferers—the connection of intimacy that has formed between them would be grounded on the past fact of God and the exemplary sufferers having done so. However, this past fact would indeed plausibly be unknown to most (if not all) non-exemplary sufferers. And thus, given their ignorance concerning the intimate connection that has formed between all of these individuals, God would see to it that this connection between God, the exemplary sufferers, and the non-exemplary sufferers is made public, which would thus require an *ongoing conscious awareness* of God having been present with each individual during their suffering, and the exemplary sufferers having (partially) empathized with these individuals.

For the connections of appreciation and contribution, it is quite clear that most (if not all) non-exemplary sufferers are unaware of the contribution that they have made to the well-being of others, and the overall improvement of the world, and neither are they aware of the gratitude that God (and the exemplary sufferers) have towards them. Hence, it is plausible that God would want to make these individuals fully aware of the contributions that they have made by granting an audience with each non-exemplary sufferer—that would also include the exemplary sufferers in attendance—where God and the exemplary sufferers could thus show their gratitude towards them, letting them understand the appreciation that they have towards them for the role that they fulfilled, and explain to each sufferer how their suffering played a role in furthering the good—namely, that of God explaining to them how they made a contribution to the improvement of the world and the well-being of all of the exemplars in attendance. Thus, there would

also be an ongoing conscious awareness of their contribution, and God and the exemplary sufferers' appreciation towards them. On the basis of this, God would thus seek to preserve in existence each and every one of the non-exemplary sufferers after their physical deaths so that this ongoing conscious awareness can be realized—and for the sentient beings that did not have the capabilities to understand the contribution that they had made, or to value the gratitude shown and intimacy established (as (most) animals, children, and non-mentally fully functional human adults wouldn't have had during their life) God would see to it to improve their psychological conditions so that they could have this ongoing conscious awareness.¹⁷⁷

In other words, given the need for ongoing conscious awareness of the empathetic action of God and exemplary sufferers towards each of the non-exemplary sufferers—and that of their contribution to the well-being of others, and God and the non-exemplary sufferers' appreciation towards them—there would thus be a formation of ACI connections between God, the exemplary sufferers, and each of the non-exemplary sufferers that will extend *everlastingly* into the afterlife (with the possibility for this connection to be recognized and valued by *all* non-exemplary sufferers by God having improved their psychological condition).¹⁷⁸ And thus, given this, we can

(11) (Exemplary
Compensation)

God, in permitting a suffering experience E that is bad for a non-exemplary sufferer, in order to produce the good of enabling exemplary sufferers to transform into exemplars, can be still be justified in permitting E by God 'making it up' to the non-exemplary sufferer by giving them an appropriate access to ongoing, infinitely valuable connections of appreciation, contribution, and intimacy that compensates the non-exemplary sufferer for the harm suffered because of that experience.

understand the logic of the compensation provided for their suffering being that of being connected to God and the exemplary sufferers in these ways, which we can state succinctly as follows:

177. Importantly, God seeking to preserve non-exemplary sufferers (i.e., non-mentally fully functional human adults, young and/or non-mentally fully functional human children, and all the different types of animals) does not mean that he would also seek to do this for exemplary sufferers (such as mentally fully functional adults) as well; rather, their preservation in existence might be dependent on their own actions throughout their life. Thus, this account does *not* commit one to a universalistic understanding of the afterlife.

178. Moreover, it is also plausible that there would be a level of gratitude towards God that is shown by each non-exemplary sufferer (animals included!) because of what he has done for them. That is, the awareness that each non-exemplary sufferer gains in the next life of God having experienced their suffering with them—that they were never alone in their suffering—will enable them to have an ongoing appreciation of God having been present with them.

More specifically, each moment of an ongoing, conscious awareness of God and other exemplary sufferers' empathetic action toward all non-exemplary sufferers, the contribution provided to the well-being of others, and the former's appreciation for this contribution being made by these individuals, possesses a certain level of intrinsic value. Now, the *total value* of the ACI connections that have been formed between God, the exemplary sufferers, and all non-exemplary sufferers can plausibly be thought to be one that can *increase* in value over time—and can continue to increase to the extent that eventually it would outweigh the value of the suffering experiences of each of the non-exemplary sufferers.¹⁷⁹ The plausibility of this increase in value can be seen clearly through the following analogy, provided by Collins,¹⁸⁰ of a more mundane experience:

suppose you had a minor toothache, but to get rid of the toothache you had to undergo an extremely painful operation. If you were told that the toothache would only last a week, or even a year, you would probably not undergo the operation. But, if you found out it would last for all eternity, you would probably undergo it. (I certainly would!) The difference in these two cases is that the disvalue of an ongoing toothache increases with time, eventually outweighing the disvalue of the painful operation to remove it, even if the toothache is only mild.

In a similar manner, the value of the ACI connections between God, the exemplary sufferers, and all non-exemplary sufferers—and the ongoing awareness of them—would thus increase with time to a point (on the scale of eternity) that would thus outweigh the negative value had by the suffering experience of a non-exemplary sufferer. This fact, following Collins again,¹⁸¹ can be further emphasized through the following crude model: first, suppose that one's future life can be divided into small successive units of time: Δt . Second, now also suppose that for each Δt , the conscious experience of some particular positive connection between two individuals has an intrinsic value of ΔG .¹⁸² Then—assuming that a certain set of successive intrinsic goods can be summed—this sum will continue to grow as long as the connection remains part of the individual's ongoing experience, as growth in value, according to Collins, 'requires the continuing instantiation of some states of affairs with intrinsic value'.¹⁸³ Thus, God will seek to compensate for the suffering of all non-sufferers for the good of them providing opportunities for others to become exemplars. Hence, on the basis of this

179. Even though the continued existence and increase in value of the intimate connection between God and all non-exemplary sufferers is not inevitable, it does seem plausible, following Collins, 'Connection', p. 224, for one to hypothesize the fact of it being within God's power to arrange for each of these sufferers' afterlife psychology and environment to be as such that this would indeed take place.

180. Collins, 'Connection', p. 225.

181. Collins, 'Connection', p. 225.

182. Collins, 'Connection', p. 225.

183. Collins, 'Connection', p. 224.

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- (12) (Exemplar Greater Good) The transformation of an individual into an exemplar is a greater good, if and only if:
- (i) Allowing an exemplary sufferer (i.e., an individual that can become an exemplar) to suffer is the only morally permissible way in which God can provide an opportunity for them to transform into an exemplar.
 - (ii) The expected value of allowing the experience of suffering by exemplary sufferers, given the opportunity for them to transform into an exemplar, and the expected value of allowing the experience of suffering by non-exemplary sufferers (i.e., individuals who cannot become exemplars), given the opportunity for them to enable others to transform into exemplars and the compensation provided by the production of ongoing connections of appreciation, contribution, and intimacy between them, God and other exemplary sufferers, is positive.
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conceptualization of the nature of the compensation needed to ‘override’ a non-exemplary sufferer’s experience of suffering—and thus justify God in having allowed it to occur—we can further precisify the greater good that is produced by an experience of suffering as follows:¹⁸⁴

In order for the Exemplarist Theodicy to provide a successful justification for God allowing *all* individuals to suffer, God must thus seek to permit a given suffering experience to occur to an individual if it provides them with the opportunity to transform into an exemplar. However, if it does not provide this opportunity (for whatever specific reason), but the suffering experience allows the good of the individual being of use in allowing others to undergo this transformation, then God is justified in permitting that suffering if he will ‘make it up’ to these individuals (e.g., to Bambi and Sue for their terrible, agonizing suffering) by compensating them with a different good: that of ongoing, appreciative, contributory, and intimate connections with him, and other exemplary sufferers, that are grounded on him and these exemplary sufferers having shared (totally, for God, and partially, for the exemplary sufferers) in the suffering experiences of these individuals—and these sufferers having undergone their experiences for the benefit of others. And, given that the intrinsic value of this connection would be one that will be forever increasing, the production of these connections between God, the exemplary sufferers, and them, would be a sufficient compensation (as the value of it will be one that is greater than the total disvalue of each of their suffering experiences). We can now provide an illustration in Figure 7 of the conclusion that has finally been reached here.

184. In our context, for something to ‘override’ something else is for the value of the former thing to outweigh the value of the latter thing.

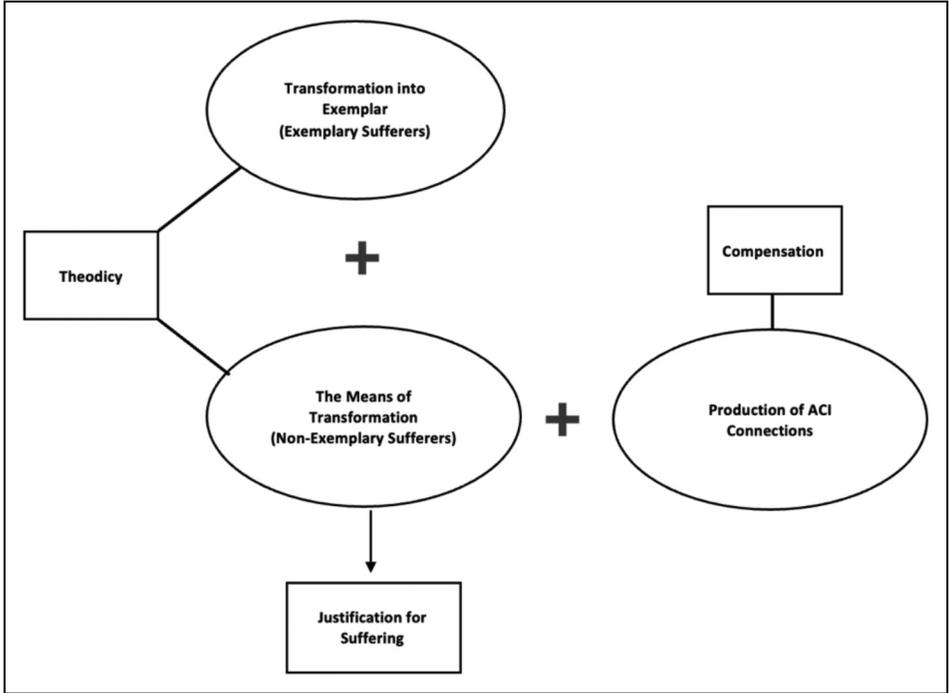


Figure 7. Theodicy Construction (iii).

Hence, within the framework established by the Exemplarist Theodicy, God having allowed a certain class of individuals to suffer—namely, the exemplary sufferers—would be justified by them being presented with the opportunity to transform into exemplars, and thus make a great contribution to the world being a good world. However, God is also justified in having allowed the rest of the sentient creatures in existence—namely, the non-exemplary sufferers—that do not fall into the aforementioned class, to suffer (and thus their suffering experiences not being gratuitous), given that the fact of them having undergone these experiences provides them with the opportunity to be of use in enabling other individuals to undergo the process of transforming into exemplars—and thus they are indirectly involved in the process of making the world a good world. Yet, them having fulfilled this role does not justify their suffering, unless God would also seek to adequately compensate them for this—with this compensation occurring by the disvalue of their suffering being overridden by an ongoing, infinitely valuable connection to God and other individuals. Therefore, on the basis of the Exemplarist Theodicy—and the further precisification of it that has now been provided—one can thus continue to affirm the existence of God in a world of suffering.¹⁸⁵

185. For ease of writing, from now on the term 'creatively flourishing' (or 'creative flourishing') will now drop out and be implicitly assumed in the phrase 'making the world a good world'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the central focus of this article was to formulate a new theodicy termed the Exemplarist Theodicy. This theodicy was explicated within the moral framework of Exemplarism and further elucidated through the utilization of the notion of a transformative experience and a certain virtue-theoretic approach to suffering. As a theodicy, the role of the Exemplarist Theodicy was to provide a reason or justification for why God allows suffering to occur. At the heart of the answer provided by this theodicy was that of the greater good of transforming into an exemplar, which enables one to have the great responsibility of grounding morality and partaking in God's creative activity (of making this world into a 'good' world). God is thus justified in allowing an individual to suffer, as one's suffering is a necessary means of achieving this end and providing the motivating force for one to truly achieve this transformative goal. And for the individuals that do not, or cannot, ever reach this transformative goal, their suffering is not in vain, given that they will fulfil the important role of providing others with the opportunity to reach this goal. These latter individuals, however, require adequate compensation for the role that they have fulfilled, and God would seek to provide this through him, and other exemplary sufferers, appreciating their contributions to the betterment of the world and the well-being of the exemplary sufferers, and by the empathy shown towards these individuals by other exemplary sufferers—and his total empathy with them in their suffering—which, in combination, would provide the production of ongoing, infinitely valuable connections of appreciation, contribution, and intimacy between them—with the total value of these connections eventually, over the extent of eternity, overriding the total disvalue of the suffering experience that was had by them. Thus, given the Exemplarist Theodicy, one can indeed hold the common view of suffering in the world consistently together with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God.

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186. Paul, *Transformative*.

187. Carel and Kidd, 'Suffering', p. 206.