THE EVIDENTIAL PROBLEM OF EVIL AND THE AESTHETICS OF SURPRISE

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Paul Draper argues that given theism we should not expect the amount of pain and suffering we observe in the world. And since the prevalence of such evils is not surprising from a non-theistic perspective, we should reject the theistic hypothesis. But not all surprising observations are necessarily a demerit when it comes to the assessment of a given theoretical perspective. I propose that on Christian theism the prevalence of evil is a surprising feature that contributes to the overall aesthetic merit of the theistic hypothesis. This element of surprise in the world, when considered as a divine drama, sets the stage for an even more surprising dramatic upswing where the work of God solves the central narrative riddle of human history, namely evil and how it can be conquered.

Arguably, the most powerful evidential argument from evil has been articulated by Paul Draper. A crucial premise in his argument is that the prevalence of evil we observe on earth is surprising from a theistic perspective. That is, if classical theism were true, we should not expect the amount of pain and suffering we observe in this world. Since Draper's appeal to surprise or foiled expectations plays a pivotal role in his argument, this warrants close examination. Are surprising observations necessarily a demerit when it comes to the assessment of a given theoretical perspective? Here I will discuss an important way in which surprising phenomena do not render a perspective less probable but actually enhance its appeal. This is the aesthetic

dimension. Given that from a theistic perspective the world is a sort of artwork and surprising features of an artwork are relevant to overall judgments about an artwork's quality, theism might enjoy aesthetic merits that deserve consideration when assessing this hypothesis in light of the prevalence of evil in the world. And if a particular theistic perspective is conspicuously marked by a tradition of surprises, this might even recommend that we should expect to be surprised by certain things we encounter in this world. Perhaps the prevalence of evil is one such surprising feature.

1. Draper's Argument

Let us review Draper's argument. He begins by pointing out that a proper assessment of the explanatory power of theism regarding evil must include a comparative assessment of theism and non-theistic alternatives. In other words, we should inquire "whether or not any serious hypothesis that is logically inconsistent with theism explains some significant set of facts about evil or about good and evil much better than theism does."[1] Accordingly, he proposes to make an inductive comparison between the theistic hypothesis and a naturalistic hypothesis. By "theism" Draper means "an omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect person who created the universe."[2] It is this classical theistic perspective with which he aims to compare what he calls the "Hypothesis of Indifference":

> HI: Neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human persons.[3]

Draper asks us to consider which of these two hypotheses, theism or HI, better accounts for the observable facts pertaining to pleasure and pain in this world, which together are captured in "O":

> O: A statement reporting both the observations one has made of humans and animals experiencing pain or pleasure and the testimony one has encountered concerning the observations others have made of sentient beings experiencing pain or pleasure.[4]

Draper believes that a fair assessment will lead us to conclude that "HI explains the facts O reports much better than theism does."[5] Specifically, the amount of pain in this world is so significant that it counts as good *prima facie* grounds for rejecting theism.

Draper clarifies what he means by "explanation," noting that "in some instances the claim that one hypothesis explains some observation report much better than another is equivalent in meaning . . . to the claim that the truth of that observation report is much less surprising on the first hypothesis than it is on the second."[6] He explicitly appeals to the element of surprise as an indicator of overall probability when comparatively assessing theism and HI. Thus, we should consider HI to be more probable because O is much less surprising given HI than given theism.

Draper's deployment of the concept of surprise is not incidental to his argument but actually plays a formal role. In the above quoted passage, he *equates* a reasonable explanation with a hypothesis that is less surprising than its competitors. Elsewhere, he articulates this stance as follows: "one hypothesis 'explains' certain facts much better than another if those facts are much more to be expected or much less surprising (in an epistemic sense) on the one hypothesis than on the other."[7] So, Draper's considered view is that the overall explanatory power of a hypothesis is properly construed in terms of expectation or surprise. And in the present context of assessing the comparative explanatory merit of hypotheses regarding the distribution of pains and pleasures in this world, that hypothesis which renders O least surprising should be judged the superior hypothesis, other things being equal.

2. The Aesthetic Merits of Surprise

Now let's suppose that the extent of evil in this world truly is surprising. Does this foiled expectation necessarily constitute evidence against theism such that this fact about the world renders theism improbable or at least much less probable than it otherwise would be? Draper obviously thinks so. I believe he is mistaken here, and it is because he fails to consider the possibility that surprise and foiled expectations can, in certain contexts, be merits rather than evidential liabilities of a particular view or theory. The sort of merit I have in mind here is aesthetic in nature.

Alexandre Declos has argued that surprise has aesthetic value. More specifically, he maintains that the capacity of an artwork to surprise us is relevant to an audience's appreciation of that artwork and their judgments of its aesthetic value. Declos' argument assumes that surprise "is a kind of *emotion*, consisting in the individual's response to some event experienced as unexpected, puzzling, or extraordinary."[8] He also notes that surprise is epistemically grounded, as it always works against a doxastic background, presupposing certain beliefs against which a state of affairs emerges as unexpected. And, as we know, the element of surprise often plays a critical role in artworks, whether in literature, music, film, theater, or even architecture.

With these points in hand, Declos argues that surprise is "significant for our appreciation of art," and this for three reasons.[9] First, surprise is sometimes necessary for a proper understanding of certain artworks. In the world of music, Mozart's use of animal sounds in his *Toy Symphony*, the death of the song's namesake in the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby," and Radiohead's computer-generated vocal in "Fitter Happier" come to mind. Classic examples from film include *Psycho*, where the real "psycho" turns out to be someone quite unexpected and *The Wizard of Oz*, where Dorothy enters an entirely unexpected world which—surprise again—turns

out to be a dream. And literary masterpieces from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* are replete with surprises that are essential to thematic and character developments in the narratives. Declos maintains that the element of surprise is crucial for correctly understanding or properly experiencing certain works of art, such as these.[10] Moreover, he suggests that "surprise is necessary for the correct functioning of certain *kinds* of artworks."[11] Consider the murder mystery and horror film genres as cases in point.

The significance of surprise for art appreciation, according to Declos, is also evident in the fact that surprise is correlated with ascription of aesthetic value. He observes how "masterworks are . . . generally considered to be the most surprising ones, because they convey something revolutionary, absolutely new, and irremediably rich."[12] Also relevant to Declos' point is the fact that artworks which we find to be predictable we typically judge to be uninteresting, dull, or otherwise of low aesthetic merit. Declos is not suggesting that all artworks must surprise their audiences in order to be aesthetically meritorious but just that, generally speaking, there is a correlation between the degree to which an artwork evokes surprise and our judgments of their aesthetic value, other things being equal.

Declos' third reason for maintaining that the element of surprise has positive aesthetic value is that there is a significant link between surprise and creativity. He observes, "we generally consider creative artists to be the ones breaking or renewing the established codes and conventions, proposing something unprecedented, making us think or feel in a new way. The ability to produce surprise, then, could perhaps be seen as a sign of artistic mastery or a criterion for creativity."[13] All of this supports Declos' contention that surprise is a significant factor in assessing an artwork's overall aesthetic value. Margaret Boden has further unpacked this connection by noting multiple ways in which the capacity to evoke surprise is linked to creativity

generally, not just in artworks. She notes that ideas may surprise because of their unfamiliarity or improbability, because they do not fit an accustomed way of thinking about an issue, or because the idea is shown to be plausible which at first appeared impossible. Boden terms these forms of surprise, respectively, combinational creativity, exploratory creativity, and transformational creativity.[14]

There are many ways in which an artwork may surprise us in aesthetically meritorious ways. When it comes to narrative artworks (e.g., novels and films) surprises or foiled expectations take the form of stories in which the tale turns out very different than the audience expects, either in a negative or positive direction. Tragedies and comedies are forms of each of these, respectively. Now consider two categories of positive surprise in narrative works. One of these is when a negative or disappointing event sets the stage for a dramatically positive development. This is the dramatic upswing. The fairy tale *Cinderella* is a classic example, as is Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In both stories, the central character suffers protracted injustice only to triumph in the end. Since we love the main characters, we are thrilled by their final exaltation. And films such as *Erin Brockovich* and *The Shawshank Redemption* are cinematic examples. The most extreme version of the dramatic upswing involves a narrative in which a seeming impossibility turns out to be true. This is the category of narrative that J. R. R. Tolkien calls *eucatastrope*, where the final upswing is utterly exhilarating in its hopefulness, resulting in an unsullied happy ending. The eucatastrophic story is the exact opposite of tragedy, as its joyous conclusion seems too good to be true.[15]

Of course, achievement of extreme upswings requires a devastating downturn at some point, which naturally involves death in most cases, such as in fairy tales like *Snow White* and *Tangled* and films such as *The Abyss* and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*. In each of these stories, we

are crushed by the death of a character we have grown to love. Since death is irreversible, there appears to be no hope of their returning. Darkness has prevailed, or so it seems. But with a kiss or a hug or some other act of love, the lost one returns from the dead, and the joy is immense. The element of surprise is the key factor in all such stories, enhancing the beauty of the narrative and amplifying our participation in the joy of the characters we love.

A final way in which a surprising narrative may be aesthetically meritorious is when the surprise takes the form of a *solved riddle* posed by the story. Novels such as Dickens' *Great Expectations* and Du Maurier's *Rebecca* are classic examples, as are films such as *The Sixth Sense, Knives Out,* and *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. In each of these stories, a confounding puzzle is solved in the narrative climax. And in each case, it involves a twist we never could have guessed, though in retrospect it all makes perfect sense. In the best novels and films that feature riddles, the lingering suspense not only creates dramatic tension but may also be unpleasant because the hiddenness of the truth is confusing or frustrating. But all of these negative emotions are relieved when the truth is finally revealed, the riddle is solved, and so many curious aspects of the narrative suddenly make sense. These are aesthetic experiences that can border on euphoric, which is why so many creators of narrative artforms deploy this motif. The payoff in terms of audience satisfaction is about as great as it gets in the world of art.

3. The Surprising Nature of Christian Theism

So how does all of this relate to the present topic? Theism views the entire cosmos and human history in particular as a divine artwork along the lines of a grand theatrical production, complete with a broad plotline, countless sub-narratives, billions of characters, and major and minor themes. It is a tale full of narrative tension, leading to an ultimate climax and final resolution.

Accordingly, our world and its history warrant aesthetic appreciation. Indeed, the Judeo-Christian scriptures are full of such acknowledgments. A psalmist writes, "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1).[16] Another psalm declares, "Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds" (Ps. 111:2-3).

If we assume this aesthetic perspective, then given our observations above about the aesthetic significance of surprise in artworks, we should be alert to potential surprises in the divine narrative. So, do we find any surprises in the biblical story of redemption? Very many, in fact. It is a tale packed with unexpected developments, not only historical but moral and metaphysical in nature. These include the choice of Israel as the people through whom God would communicate to the world, the birth of Isaac—an eventual patriarch—to a 90-year-old woman, God's command to Abraham to kill his son Isaac and God's subsequent miraculous prevention of that sacrifice, the selection of Moses as God's mouthpiece for ancient Israel, God's calling and appointment of multiple unlikely Old Testament prophets and kings, the divine incarnation, virgin birth, humble earthly station, ignominious death, and physical resurrection of the messiah, the prominent role of women in the Easter narrative, the choice of Saul of Tarsus to be God's primary Gospel messenger, as well as many surprising ironies in the moral teachings of Christ (e.g., love your enemies, die to yourself, the last shall be first, salvation by grace, etc.). These are all surprising developments, to be sure. Especially as regards pivotal events in the life of Christ, we can be confident that no one expected any of these things to happen. Even more unlikely—to the point of apparent absurdity—is the notion that the suffering and death of the messiah would be the means of the world's salvation—that such a dark and brutal event would prove to be the cure for the curse on humanity, that the most unjust death would bring eternal

life, that the saddest moment in history would effect everlasting joy. Here we have a story with so many bizarre and ironic twists that it boggles the mind.

Note that all of these features of the biblical story of redemption qualify as aesthetically enriching narrative qualities warranting greater aesthetic appreciation for this aspect of the divine artwork. Whether or not the story is *true*, the sheer beauty of the story seems undeniable. We certainly see *dramatic upswing*, the most dramatic upswing possible, in fact, even to the point of eucatastrophe, as history's greatest hero is killed in the worst possible way only to return to life in the best possible way, achieving salvation for the fellow characters (who, incidentally, include those in the "audience"). The story strikes many as too good to be true, almost at the level of a fairy tale in terms of its extreme good news, so good that not only the featured characters but potentially all audience members live "happily ever after" as a result.

The Christian redemption story also centrally features a dramatically *solved riddle*. Christ provides the solution, actually, to a *bundle* of riddles that are theological and philosophical in nature. One theological riddle is the problem of human fallenness and all of the condemnation that apparently entails. How could humans ever be rescued from their corruption, much less fully justified before God? The work of Christ ingeniously achieves both of these ends in a way that makes perfect sense in light of the Old Testament sacrificial system yet was nonetheless surprising in its execution (pun not intended). A more existential riddle addressed by the Christ event is the problem of divine transcendence, which seemed to preclude divine immanence and genuine understanding of the human condition. How could even an omniscient deity truly understand what it is like to be human, to suffer as we suffer, to be tempted as we are tempted, and to despair as we despair? This riddle, too, is solved in a way that no one could have predicted or even imagined, as God in Christ was existentially immersed in human suffering,

temptation, and despair, indeed, to the highest degree. Christ was, from start to finish, truly a "man of sorrows." And suddenly, surprisingly, we had a God who personally identified with even the darkest aspects of the human condition. Still other theological riddles concerned the paradoxes of Old Testament predictive prophecies about the coming messiah, which variously described him as a king (e.g., Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17-19) and a suffering servant (e.g., Isa. 52:13-53:12). This paradox was resolved in Christ, the suffering servant during his earthly ministry and triumphant ruler in the next world in a kingdom to be inaugurated by his triumphant return to launch his eschatological reign.

Yet another major riddle pertaining to theism is philosophical in nature and concerns a particularly intractable aspect of the problem of evil. Marilyn Adams defines the category of "horrendous evil" as including "evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of) which gives one reason *prima facie* to doubt whether one's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole."[17] Such evils create a problem of reconciling the existence of God with the fact that there seem to be lives that are not, all things considered, worth living. These types of evils create a special problem "because it is so difficult humanly to conceive how such evils could be overcome."[18] Adams notes the limits of standard approaches to the problem of evil as a way of solving this riddle and instead appeals to the idea of "beatific vision" of God. She proposes that "the good of beatific, face-to-face intimacy with God is simply incommensurate with any merely non-transcendent goods or ills a person might experience."[19] Such a good, says Adams, would "engulf" personal horrors within a person's life, which could be achieved "only by integrating participation in horrendous evils into a person's relationship with God":[20]

> Because God in Christ participated in horrendous evil through His passion and death, human experience of horrors can be a means of identifying with Christ,

> either through sympathetic *identification* (in which each person suffers his/her own pains, but their similarity enables each to know what it is like for the other) or through mystical *identification* (in which the created person is supposed literally to experience a share of Christ's pain).[21]

Adams goes on to note that along with such identification with Christ, two other factors may contribute to the defeat of the problem of horrendous evil. One of these is the experience of divine gratitude for one's suffering with Christ—an idea that Adams borrows from Julian of Norwich. The experience of divine gratitude would produce an inexpressible joy in the believer, regardless of the things she experienced in her earthly sojourn. Another redeeming factor would be personal vision into the inner life of God, a joy so great as to be incommensurable with any temporal experience on earth, however devastatingly painful. In this way, Adams spells out a rich and plausible account for how the Christ event solves the riddle of horrendous evils.

Recall Alexandre Declos' comment that "masterworks [of art] are . . . generally considered to be the most surprising ones, because they convey something revolutionary, absolutely new, and irremediably rich."[22] Given our current place in the historical timeline, looking back at the story of Christ, the memory and celebration of which have become so deeply ensconced in the Western cultural heritage, it is easy to miss just how "absolutely new" the Christian perspective was. The fact that the Gospel of the cross was such a severe stumbling block to both Jews and Greeks that early Christians were frequently martyred confirms just how radical and revolutionary this new theology was. And when one considers the vast riches of cultural, literary, artistic, musical, social, and scientific innovation that have flowed from the Christian tradition over the last two millennia, it is evident that this perspective is also

"irremediably rich." On the theistic conception of human history as itself a divine artwork, then, it would indeed seem to qualify as a "masterwork."

When famed Hollywood producer George Stevens dubbed the life and ministry of Christ "the greatest story ever told" he did so for good reason. Even apart from its spiritual significance, it is almost universally acclaimed for its aesthetic greatness, praised for the sheer beauty of the story. Much of its aesthetic power resides in its extreme irony and otherwise surprising features; it is a narrative that baffles the mind because it is so contrary to expectations and satisfying because its ultimate message is so hopeful. And the Gospel story is but the climax of a multi-millennial narrative which, as we saw above, is repeatedly marked by surprises and the most unlikely turns of events.

Now given that human history is a sort of divine literary artwork and that the historical revelation of the God of Christian theism is so full surprises, as is consistent with the greatest of artworks, how ought one to receive an appeal to the surprising feature of the world that is the amount of evil that we observe? And to what extent ought we to construe that attitude of surprise as evidencing the improbability of the truth of Christian theism? Given the rich aesthetic of surprise characterizing Christian theism, it would seem that any argument against this worldview which pivots on the element of surprise as an evidential demerit would be problematic for just this reason. On the contrary, when it comes to everything we know about the history and theology of Christianity, one might rather *expect* to be surprised.

This ironic and somewhat paradoxical point seems to undercut Paul Draper's evidential argument from evil, depending as it does on the notion that the surprising amount of evil in the world should prompt us to reject theism. While these foiled expectations might provide some epistemic grounds for religious skepticism, they do so only if one ignores the aesthetic

dimension—specifically regarding the conception of the world as divine artwork—as it pertains to the issue. What I am suggesting here is that when the aesthetic dimension is duly considered, this should prompt an assessment of theism and the surprising prevalence of evil that is very different from Draper's.

4. Some Objections

My argument can be challenged on several fronts. Perhaps most significant is the concern that I misconstrue or else make too much of the notion of surprise as Draper intends it. Thus, one might argue that to say O is surprising on theism but not surprising on HI is really just shorthand for saying that O does not *fit* or *cohere* as well with theism as it does with HI. Or one might go so far as to insist that the surprise prompted by O relative to theism is indicative of an actual inconsistency between theism and O, in which case to reference such surprise is to intimate disconfirmation or falsification of the theistic hypothesis. But, in any case, to construe surprise in an aesthetic sense is to miss the more strictly logical, evidential sense of Draper's use of the term, which ultimately concerns the explanatory power of a hypothesis relative to the observation reports for which it aims to account.

I am happy to grant all of this, if only on *prima facie* terms. Yes, in light of O theism *appears* to be disconfirmed or perhaps even falsified. Or, alternatively, theism and the observations reported in O *seem* to be a poor fit. Or the coupling of O with belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect creator *appears* to be incoherent. Or, HI *seems* to have much more explanatory power than theism as regards O. However strongly one wants to articulate the evidential root of this epistemic sense of surprise at O given theism, I concede all of this, at least for the purposes of this paper. My point, however, is that this apparent

incoherence, falsification, and/or inexplicability is itself very much *consistent* and *coherent* with theism at the level of analysis which takes seriously the theistic perspective as representing a *dramatic narrative*. As we have seen, artworks, especially dramatic narratives, are more compelling, more beautiful, and otherwise aesthetically richer when they feature surprises, especially of the right kind. So, if human history is such a divine drama, then we have good reason to believe that the logical tension at the root of even this surprising feature—the present inexplicability of O—will at last be resolved.

At least in the tradition of Christian theism, seeming incoherencies, even apparent logical contradictions, are often resolved, turning out to be true where once this was inconceivable, whether concerning the triune Godhead, the hypostatic union of God and man in Christ, and the messiah as suffering servant and triumphant king, not to mention other doctrines whose full comprehensibility has yet to be shown (e.g., creation *ex nihilo*, the compatibility of divine predestination and human responsibility, and moral paradoxes in the teachings of Christ). And, as already canvassed, the historical surprises in Judeo-Christian history are numerous, marking this brand of theism as definitively ironic, a point that is underscored by the fact that the defining moral quality of Jesus Christ—humility—is itself an essentially ironic virtue.[23]

Here one might insist that those incoherencies only compound the problem with theism, demonstrating how these are just more reasons to reject this hypothesis. But this misses the point. I am suggesting that all of those apparent incoherencies are merely apparent and therefore mere paradoxes, not true contradictions. And that these deep logical resolutions of apparent inconsistencies create a substantial historical and metaphysical precedent that should prompt the theist—or at least the Christian theist—to regard the surprising import of O as probably yet

another paradox that will find resolution in the eschaton. After all, God has pulled this off in many other ways which seemed impossible or at least highly unlikely. So why not here?

Another possible objection concerns my appeal to the content of a specific brand of theism, Christian theism, in response to Draper's argument. After all, Draper's argument pertains to theism *simpliciter*. So, if we follow Draper in restricting our attention to the core concept of classical theism—that of an omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect person who created the world—and we ignore all of the particulars of human history and doctrinal features of Christian theism, then not only does the amount of evil in the world seem surprising but we have no grounds for regarding this surprising feature as consistent with theism.

Before I reply, it will be helpful to note William Rowe's distinction between "restricted" and "expanded" theism. Rowe defines *restricted* theism as the view that an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being exists, "unaccompanied by other, independent religious claims," whereas *expanded* theism is the view that an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being exists, "conjoined with certain other significant religious claims, claims about sin, redemption, a future life, a last judgment, and the like."[24] Now it is significant that as Draper presents his evidential argument from evil, what he calls the hypothesis of theism essentially corresponds with Rowe's conception of *restricted* theism. It is as compared to this restricted theism that Draper judges, perhaps rightly, the Hypothesis of Indifference to have more explanatory power as regards O. But why must the theist be bound by this restriction when making a comparative assessment of these two hypotheses? Why must one ignore the resources within a particular theistic tradition if those resources may be decisive in refuting an argument against it? Whether or not Draper intended it, by styling his evidential argument from evil in such generic terms, targeting restricted theism, he effectively handicaps theists in terms of the

sorts of rejoinders they can make to his argument. I see no reason to accept this handicap, as my explicit appeal here to many of the resources of a specifically Christian expanded theism demonstrates.

Having said that, even on the sort of restricted theism that Draper aims to assess, such a God is the creator of all things. This means that God must be regarded as an artist and the world as his artwork. Just granting this much entails the relevance of the aesthetic dimension when making assessments as to the merits of theism vis-à-vis O. And granting that the element of surprise is quite relevant to aesthetic appraisals, this provides warrant for expanding our comparative assessment of theism and HI in light of the fact—if it is a fact—that the amount of evil in this world is surprising.

A final objection pertains to a potential confusion of theoretical categories. One might insist that surprise, especially in the form of irony, may be meritorious in the context of literary narratives but not when it comes to philosophical theory assessment, which is what Draper aims to do in assessing, in light of O, the relative merits of HI and theism as ultimate metaphysical theories. So, my appeal to the positive aesthetic qualities of surprise is simply not applicable to the theistic hypothesis when it comes to our observations about evil in the world.

In response to this concern, I would first note that the element of surprise does play a significant role in non-literary contexts, including science. In a recent article, Steven French and Alice Murphy have insightfully analyzed the significant role of surprise in science.[25] They note at least two important forms of surprise in scientific research. One of these concerns surprising *theoretical derivations*, inferences drawn from principles or suppositions within a current theoretical paradigm that are somehow unexpected. Such surprises are sometimes valuable because they spawn fertile research programs or further theoretical exploration and yield novel

predictions and new practical applications. Einstein's $E=MC^2$ is a vivid instance of this. Another category of surprise noted by French and Murphy concerns *experimental results* that defy predictions. Such surprises may be "mere surprises" which don't challenge a theoretical paradigm at its core but simply provide clarification or, at most, minor modifications of the reigning theoretical framework. Other surprises are such that they constitute genuine confoundment. These surprises call into question fundamental theoretical commitments as they seem to defy explanation in a way that is consistent with the principles of that theory. Just when certain data should be judged confounding as opposed to merely surprising is, of course, a matter of debate when it comes to particular instances of theory assessment. As the history of science shows, these debates can go on for decades and even centuries.

Now all of this seems applicable to Draper's approach to the comparative assessment of theism and HI. To his mind, O is quite surprising from the theoretical perspective of theism (but not HI), so much so, Draper would presumably say, as to be confounding for the theist. That he would say so is evident in the fact that he considers O to be "*prima facie* good epistemic reason to reject theism."[26] But how do we know that the O data are confounding as opposed to merely surprising on theism? This depends on whether there are resources within the theistic tradition that would make such surprising data less than confounding. As we have seen, there is a long history of surprises in the Judeo-Christian theological tradition which do just this. Moreover, we might even say that given these facts about this theistic tradition one could reasonably infer that more surprises are coming in the form of dramatic upswings and solved riddles. Are there theological principles within this tradition and its sacred writings that provide grounds for theoretical derivations that are surprising in French and Murphy's sense? One major biblical eschatological theme stands out in this regard, specifically that God will one day conquer and

redeem all evil, permanently orienting human hearts toward the good, wiping away every tear, and bringing about a peaceable kingdom where there is no pain or suffering. This is certainly a novel prediction that, if fulfilled, would constitute the ultimate eucatastrophic dramatic upswing and solution to the riddle of evil that to many observers, Draper included, appears quite confounding.

Thus far, my reply to this objection has aimed to show that attention to the evidential import of surprising data and predictions is relevant in both scientific and philosophical domains. Still, one might nonetheless complain that I have crossed a line in hauling aesthetic considerations into the realm of theory assessment where they do not belong. In response, I would note that beauty and elegance are not only features of artworks but also of scientific theories. Aesthetic properties are widely acknowledged to be, *ceteris paribus*, an appreciable asset to any scientific or mathematical theory. Michael Keas has offered a systematic analysis of theoretical virtues, classifying the positive features of good theories into four major categories, those being evidential virtues, coherential virtues, diachronic virtues, and aesthetic virtues. Keas identifies beauty as one of the principal aesthetic virtues displayed by good theories. He notes that "a beautiful theory evokes aesthetic pleasure in properly functioning and sufficiently informed persons." He adds that "the properties of theories and mathematical proofs that are among those factors that trigger the experience of beauty include symmetry, aptness and surprising inevitability."[27]

Many renowned scientists have remarked how their own theoretical inclinations were significantly driven by considerations of beauty and other aesthetic features. For example, one of the founders of quantum mechanics, physicist Paul Dirac, declared, "The foundations of the theory are, I believe, stronger than what one could get simply from the support of experimental

evidence. The real foundations come from the great beauty of the theory . . .. It is the essential beauty of the theory which I feel is the real reason for believing in it."[28] Fellow physicist Werner Heisenberg maintained that there is an intrinsic connection between truth and beauty, asserting that "if nature leads us to mathematical forms of great simplicity and beauty we cannot help thinking that they are 'true,' that they reveal a genuine feature of nature."[29] And scientist and mathematician John von Neumann has said, "a mathematician's criteria of success, and also those of truth, are mainly aesthetic."[30] Such testimonials do not by themselves establish that consultation of aesthetic properties is normative for scientific theory assessment. But they are indicative of the fact that such thinking is common in the sciences and that Keas' inclusion of aesthetic excellences among his major categories of theoretical virtues is reasonable.[31] Now if there is plausibility to the claim that aesthetic values may be appropriately considered in the context of scientific theory formation, then, *a fortiori*, the same should go for metaphysical and theological theories such as theism. After all, on a theistic view, human history is a dramatic narrative, the cosmos is God's physical artwork, and biblical doctrine displays a sort of artistry.[32]

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have granted Draper's assumption that O is surprising given theism. But I have challenged the notion that this necessarily constitutes evidence against theism, rendering it, on the whole, improbable. I proposed that on the theistic hypothesis O may indeed be surprising, but O contributes to the aesthetically valuable element of surprise in the world when considered as a divine artwork if O sets the stage for an even more surprising dramatic upswing where the work of God solves the central narrative riddle of human history, which is how this human plague we call evil could ever be conquered. On Christian theism both aspects of evil—natural evil and

moral evil—are conquered, as natural evil is defeated (the wiping away of every tear, bringing about the peaceable kingdom) and moral evil is redeemed (complete forgiveness and radical human moral reorientation) thus rendering a maximally satisfying eucatastrophe. In these ways, the surprise of O and its solution make the divine artwork more aesthetically rich.

Robert Pargetter has observed that assessments of whether the problem of evil is a defeater for theism "is a matter that will require holistic consideration of . . . alternative belief systems."[33] Given the structure of Paul Draper's evidential argument from evil, he should agree with this point. My argument here may be construed as an invitation to consider an important aspect of theism generally and an expanded Christian theism in particular that is often ignored in the context of evaluating evidential arguments from evil. This is the aesthetic dimension, which when given due consideration dramatically enhances the prospects of a theistic perspective when subjecting it to a comparative holistic assessment vis-à-vis metaphysically naturalistic alternatives such as Draper's Hypothesis of Indifference.

I have long thought that contemporary analytic philosophy of religion is much in need of deeper input from the world of art and aesthetics. The category of beauty and aesthetic qualities generally are fundamental to human experience and virtually every domain of scholarly inquiry. So, to ignore the aesthetic dimension when assessing religious truth claims would seem to be a significant oversight, perhaps resulting in a truncated overall assessment of the whole domain of religion, from the doctrine of God to the problem of evil. Here I have attempted to show how aesthetic considerations can be particularly useful in addressing the latter issue. Perhaps this will be of some help in encouraging more such work toward an aesthetically enriched philosophy of religion.[34]

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NOTES

[1] Draper, “Pain and Pleasure,” 332.

[2] Draper, “Pain and Pleasure,” 331.

[3] Draper, “Pain and Pleasure,” 332.

[4] Draper, “Pain and Pleasure,” 332.

[5] Draper, “Pain and Pleasure,” 333.

[6] Draper, “Pain and Pleasure,” 333.

[7] Draper, “Probabilistic Arguments from Evil,” 316.

[8] Declos, “The Aesthetic and Cognitive Value of Surprise,” 54 (author’s emphasis). This seems to me to be at least roughly correct, though there is disagreement among scholars. Some, such as Ekman, et al. in “Autonomic Nervous System Activity Distinguishes Among Emotions,” view

surprise as a prototypical emotion like sadness, fear, or anger. Others, such as Maguire, et al. in "Making Sense of Surprise," regard surprise as a non-standard emotion. Still others, such as Lorini and Castelfranchi in "The Cognitive Structure of Surprise," construe surprise as a fundamentally cognitive, "belief-based" experience.

[9] Declos, "The Aesthetic and Cognitive Value of Surprise," 57.

[10] The examples just discussed are of my own choosing, not those of Declos.

[11] Declos, "The Aesthetic and Cognitive Value of Surprise," 58 (author's emphasis).

[12] Declos, "The Aesthetic and Cognitive Value of Surprise," 60.

[13] Declos, "The Aesthetic and Cognitive Value of Surprise," 61.

[14] Boden, *The Creative Mind,* 2-3.

[15] Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," 88.

[16] This and all other biblical references are from the New International Version of the Bible.

[17] Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," 211.

[18] Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," 211.

[19] Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," 218.

[20] Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," 218.

[21] Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," 219.

[22] Declos, "The Aesthetic and Cognitive Value of Surprise," 60.

[23] See Spiegel, "Humility as Moral Irony."

[24] Rowe, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis," 95.

[25] French and Murphy, "The Value of Surprise in Science."

[26] Draper, "Pain and Pleasure," 331.

[27] Keas, "Systematizing the Theoretical Virtues," 2773.

[28] Dirac, "The Excellence of Einstein's Theory of Gravitation," 10.

[29] Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond*, 68.

[30] von Neumann, "The Mathematician," 2062.

[31] For more on this subject, see McAllister, *Beauty and Revolution in Science*.

[32] This theological aesthetic has a long history, going back at least as far as Augustine but also emphasized by the likes of Leibniz, Berkeley, and Edwards, and more recently by Marilyn Adams in "Aesthetic Goodness as a Solution to the Problem of Evil," David Bentley Hart in *The Beauty of the Infinite*, Kevin Vanhoozer in *The Drama of Doctrine*, and in Hans Urs von Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord* and *Theo-Drama*. Interestingly, even Friedrich Nietzsche, was sympathetic with this perspective, asserting that "the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon" and, in a rare moment of openness to theism, declaring, "only an artistic meaning and crypto-meaning behind all events—a 'god,' if you please, but certainly only an entirely reckless and amoral artist-god who wants to experience, whether he is building or destroying, in the good and in the bad, his own joy and glory—one who, creating worlds, frees himself from the *distress* of fullness and *overfullness*, and from the *affliction* of the contradictions compressed in his soul" (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, 23; author's emphases).

[33] Pargetter, "Experience, Proper Basicality, and Belief in God," 157.

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