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# Horrendous-Difference Disabilities, Resurrected Saints, and the Beatific Vision: A Theodicy

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**Abstract:** Marilyn Adams rightly pointed out that there are many kinds of evil, some of which are horrendous. I claim that one species of horrendous evil is what I call horrendous-difference disabilities. I distinguish two subspecies of horrendous-difference disabilities based in part on the temporal relation between one's rational moral wishing for a certain human function  $F$  and its being thwarted by intrinsic and extrinsic conditions. Next, I offer a theodicy for each subspecies of horrendous-difference disability. Although I appeal to some claims made by Marilyn Adams for this theodicy, I reject one particular claim. I deny that one must be aware that one participates in a horrendous evil when the horrific event occurs. To develop this point and its relevance for a theodicy for horrendous-difference disabilities, I engage with Andrew Chignell's work on infant suffering. In doing so, I show that what partly motivates the claim is a time-bias, i.e., near-bias. By rejecting this time-bias, I show how it is possible, given *post-mortem* life, for persons with profound cognitive disabilities to participate in horrendous evils and how these might be defeated by God.

**Keywords:** theodicy; problem of evil; horrendous evil; disability; rational moral wish satisfaction; Marilyn McCord Adams

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## 1. Defining the Categories: Disability and Horrendous-Evil

In this paper I offer a theodicy for humans who suffer profoundly from certain sorts of disability. The word 'disability' is used in many different ways in the philosophy of disability literature. I give a theodicy for a certain class of individuals who suffer from what I will call 'horrendous-difference disabilities'. I do not discuss all types of disability, but rather limit myself to a subset within the general class of those with a disability, namely those with a horrendous-difference disability. In what follows I give a working description for the sorts of disability I have in mind, for horrendous-evil, and for horrendous-difference disability.

There is much contention whether disability can be defined (Barnes 2016, pp. 9–54). There are many cases of disabilities that do not seem to have any overlap at all. It is challenging to identify necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient for the definition of disability. Fortunately, I do not need to define disability as such; instead, I need to mark out a class of individuals who identify as (or are identified by caregivers as) disabled, that is, I need to identify what this particular subclass has in common. I take Richard Cross's modified social theory of disability as a point of departure for identifying this subclass (cf. Cross 2016). Cross draws attention to the World Health Organization's extensive list of human functions.<sup>1</sup> He calls this list the maximal set of human functions. No individual human can have every kind of human function. So, all individuals have only a subset within the maximal set of human functions. Consequently, an individual's lacking some human function is common to all humans—all humans lack some kinds of human function. Cross suggests that the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. <http://apps.who.int/classifications/icfbrowser>.

badness of one's lacking a human function depends on one's own wishes. If an individual wishes to have some human function  $F$  and one lacks  $F$  because of one's own intrinsic impediment to  $F$ , then one has an *impairment* relative to  $F$ . Furthermore, if one has an impairment relative to  $F$  and one "lacks the extrinsic conditions necessary for the desired human functioning," (cf. Cross 2016, p. 708) then one has a *disability* relative to  $F$ . This account of disability excludes general social disadvantage on the basis of poverty or discrimination because disability relative to  $F$  requires impairment relative to  $F$ . The impairment is an intrinsic matter, not a matter of social discriminatory practices.

Sometimes the human function that we wish for matters a lot to us, so much so that lacking this human function can seem to devastate one. If the devastation seems insurmountable to one, then one would have reason to doubt that one's life can be a great good to one on the whole. Marilyn Adams calls the worst sorts of evils or suffering, 'horrendous evils'. Horrendous evils are moral evils when the evil is caused by an intentional agent who can be held morally responsible for perpetuating the evil on the victim. Horrendous evils are natural evils when there is no intentional agent that is responsible for the evil that the victim suffers. It can be that an individual suffers from an evil and there is no intentional agent who caused the evil; nonetheless, the victim's suffering is all too real and devastating. Adams defines horrendous evil and gives some examples, saying:

Evils the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole. The class of paradigm horrors includes both individual and collective suffering [...]. Further examples include the rape of a woman and axing off of her arms, psycho-physical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one's deepest loyalties, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation, the explosion of nuclear bombs over populated areas. (cf. Adams 1999, p. 26)

Given the above characterization of a subclass of disability and Adams's definition of horrendous evil, we can define one subclass of horrendous-difference disabilities. This definition is based on rational moral wish satisfaction (RMWS). One has a horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub> if and only if:

- (i) one has a rational wish for some human function  $F$ ,
- (ii) what is wished for is morally permissible,
- (iii) what is wished for is impeded from occurring because one has an intrinsic impediment to human function  $F$ ,
- (iv) there are no extrinsic aids that are practically accessible to the individual that would enable the individual to be or have human function  $F$  (or approximately  $F$ ) (cf. Cross 2016, p. 706), and
- (v) on the basis of (i)–(iv) one has prima facie reason to doubt that one's life can be a great good for one on the whole.

Those who suffer a horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub> find their lives devastated because there is a morally permissible way of functioning (being or doing) that they rationally wish for but do not have because of an intrinsic impediment and extrinsic impediment(s) to this functioning.

For example, Sally has begun manifesting bipolar disorder at the age of 19, and it is not successfully managed. Sally has a rational, moral, wish for the intimacy of friendship with another person, Madison, with whom she has been friends during adolescence. Madison wishes to continue being friends with Sally, but Madison finds herself unable to cope with the symptoms of Sally's bipolar disorder and breaks off the friendship because Sally is excessively needy, angry, irritated, mostly talks about her medical condition, has a non-typical sleeping schedule, and calls Madison at all hours of the night. Madison judges that she cannot participate in the intimacy of friendship with Sally anymore because

opening herself up that way brings significant and likely harm to herself.<sup>2</sup> Suppose further that Sally is alienated from her family and all others because of these symptoms of her bipolar disorder and that this holds true for the remainder of Sally's life. In effect, bipolar has ruined Sally's life. Sally has a rational moral wish for a certain human function  $F$  (in this case, being friends with Madison), but her wish is impeded by an intrinsic property (bipolar disorder) and it is impeded by extrinsic circumstances (e.g., no practical access to medicine and ways to manage the bipolar disorder). Sally lives in a society with few social safety nets and so has no extrinsic aids—e.g., the relevant medicine, doctors, care-givers, or counselors—that might be conducive for maintaining friendship with Madison. Given this overall state of affairs, Sally has *prima facie* reason (based on (i)–(iv)) to doubt that her life can be a great good for her on the whole. (If Sally's contingent historical circumstances were different in the relevant ways, then Sally would not have *prima facie* reason to doubt that her life could be a great good for her on the whole.) Given Adams's definition of a horrendous evil, Sally participates in a horrendous evil. Moreover, given that Sally's *prima facie* reason for doubt is (i)–(iv), she has suffered a horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub>.

It is important to note that an individual's *impairment* intersects with many other of the individual's intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Individuals with the same type of impairment can have different overall experiences of it depending on other factors including the individual's moral virtues (especially stoic virtues) (Adams 1999, pp. 157–58), wealth, physical resources, health care, and a supportive family or community (cf. Cobb and Timpe 2017, pp. 113–14). Two individuals with the same kind of impairment relative to human function  $F$  might experience it differently if one has the external resources to assist in bringing about the desired human function  $F$  (or something approximate to it) and the other does not. Moreover, if an individual with the impairment has sufficient external resources, then he or she might not experience the kind of suffering that the other individual experiences. This is why I am focusing on horrendous-difference *disabilities*.

## 2. The Defeat of Horrendous-Difference Disability<sub>RMWS</sub>

A horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub> is one kind of suffering that raises the problem of evil because horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub> seems incompatible with God's goodness, omniscience, and omnipotence. In what follows I piggyback on much of what Marilyn Adams says in her own theodicy of defeat. It seems to me that a theodicy for horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub> would at least say that God would defeat this suffering for the resurrected saints. About defeating a horrendous evil, Adams says,

My notion is that reason to doubt can be outweighed, if the evil  $e$  can be defeated. The evil  $e$  can be defeated if it can be included in some good-enough whole to which it bears a relation of organic (rather than merely additive) unity;  $e$  is defeated within the context of the individual's life if the individual's life is a good whole to which  $e$  bears the relevant organic unity. If the evil  $e$  is defeated within the context of an individual  $x$ 's life, the judgement 'the life of  $x$  cannot be worthwhile given that it includes  $e$ ' would be defeated, but the judgement ' $e$  is horrendous' would stand; this is because  $e$ 's inclusion in a good enough whole (even where the whole is  $x$ 's complete life span) to which it is related by organic unity does not prevent it by itself from counting as *prima facie* reason for doubting the positive value of  $x$ 's life. (Adams 1999, pp. 28–29)

Adams goes on to posit several Christian valuables that may defeat a horrendous evil. One of these is the beatific vision.<sup>3</sup> Here Adams focuses on God as "a being greater than any other conceivable being, as supreme or infinite goodness. [...] [I]f Divine Goodness is infinite, if intimate relation to It is

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of cases like this, see (Fast and Preston 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 80–85.

thus incommensurately good for created persons, then we have identified a good big enough to defeat horrors in every case.”<sup>4</sup> I take it that “in every case” includes horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub>. Adams has much else to say with regard to Christology and the defeat of horrendous evils, but I want to focus on what Thomas Aquinas says about the beatific vision. Aquinas suggests that a resurrected saint can ‘see’ more things in God the more perfectly the saint ‘sees’ God.<sup>5</sup> Given that God is responsible for causing a resurrected saint’s beatific vision, it is up to God what other things besides God that God will ‘show’ the saint. God does not cause the saint to acquire new concepts in order for the saint to cognize more things in God, rather, God just causes the resurrected saint to behold more or less in God.<sup>6</sup> Aquinas’s idea is that a saint can behold more or less of God’s power. Assuming that God has the power for causing a saint to lose a disability, I infer that a saint with a horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub> not only intellectually beholds God’s power for removing the relevant disability but also experiences God’s being an extrinsic prosthesis on which the saint depends for the relevant kind of human function *F*. In short, this saint not only intellectual beholds such divine power, but also experiences it efficaciously in herself.

How might God defeat e.g., Sally’s horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub>? First, as with all resurrected saints who participant in horrendous evil, following Adams, Sally’s prima facie reason for doubting whether her life can be a great good to her on the whole is defeated by God who is an incommensurate, infinite, good. Sally would still understand her horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub> to be an objective horrendous evil but its relation of integral unity with the infinite good brings her to understand that her life is a great good for her on the whole. Sally is a meaning-maker such that she comes to make positive meaning out of her whole life and so not only is her participation in horrendous evil objectively defeated but it seems that way to her too.

What I add to Adams’s theodicy is this: God may give Sally a rational choice whether to be rid of the extrinsic impediment to human function *F* or to be rid of the extrinsic and intrinsic impediments to human function *F*. If Sally chooses to be rid of the extrinsic impediments, then God would be an extrinsic aid or prosthesis on which Sally depends for her rationally morally desired human function *F*. If the desired function is e.g., friendship with another resurrected saint (e.g., Madison), then God would become an external prosthesis for Sally so that she functions in ways conducive to friendship with Madison. (God would be, very roughly, like medicine that Sally depends on for functioning in ways conducive to friendship with Madison.) If Sally were to make this decision, then she would retain her intrinsic impediment. One reason for this choice might be that retaining this intrinsic impediment would be roughly analogous to what Augustine says of the martyred saints. Augustine claims that saints who had been martyred and lost a limb would receive a new limb and would acquire new scars on their body as signs of their love for God. These bodily marks would not be deformities, but rather signs of love for God.<sup>7</sup> I suggest that we extend Augustine’s claim about martyred saints to saints who suffered horrendous-difference disabilities<sub>RMWS</sub> and nevertheless persevered in their love for and devotion to God. The marks or wounds of such saints can be in the glorified mind or body, and presented to and thereby known by others, in any number of ways depending on the particular kind of horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub>. What I want to say about someone like Sally is this. She might choose to retain her intrinsic impediment to *F* as a mark, a sign, of her own suffering that plays an integral narrative role in God’s defeating her own horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub>. Like the martyrs, this sign plays a narrative part in Sally’s own understanding of her life as a good for her on the whole.

Nonetheless, I think it possible that God can offer someone like Sally another choice. Not only could she choose to depend on God as an external prosthesis for functioning in ways conducive

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 82–83.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Aquinas (n.d.), *ST* 1a.12.8 ad 3, in <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/sth1003.html#28745>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1a.12.8 corp. and ad 3, in: <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/sth1003.html#28745>.

<sup>7</sup> (Augustine 1984, book 22, sect. 19, p. 1062). For discussion of this passage, see (Upson-Saia 2011, pp. 104–9).

to her desired human function  $F$ , but God could offer her the choice to have God remove the intrinsic impediment(s). What might motivate this second choice is that Sally wishes to use the integrity of her own bodily (and mental) configuration for her desired human function  $F$ . For Sally in particular, this might be a part of how God defeats her horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub>. Each choice is consistent with the beatific vision and with the defeat of horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub>. The possibility of different resurrected saints who make different choices in this regard is consistent with God's desire for human diversity; some saints have scarred and wounded bodies in the resurrection (as Augustine contends) and some have intrinsic impediments to a rationally and morally desired human function  $F$  that is nevertheless defeated for the individual and from the individual's point of view.

It is not clear to me which choice someone like Sally might make. Since I accept Adams's stipulation that the defeat of a horrendous-evil depends on the individual participant's point of view, it follows that I am not in a position to say which choice someone like Sally would make. It depends on her, that is, it depends on what it is like to Sally to depend on God as an external prosthesis for the desired function  $F$  versus what it is like to Sally to depend on the integrity of her own bodily (and mental) configuration for the desired function  $F$ .

One worry for proposing these two choices is that Sally might not be in a position to decide rationally. An objector might claim that Sally does not know what it is like for her to undergo a change according to which God is an external prosthesis for her functioning in a way conducive to being friends again with e.g., Madison. Though, she could remember what it was like to be friends with Madison (before her manifesting bipolar disorder), back when she used her own bodily (and mental) configuration for being in a friendship with her. But how could she know whether it is better to go with the first option or second option?<sup>8</sup> I do not believe deciding in this sort of situation is akin to deciding whether to undergo a transformative experience that would change your own personal preferences and how you evaluate your own experience. In this situation, if Sally goes with the first option, what would change are not her rational moral wishes but rather she would gain a means by which she could satisfy her rational moral wish. Furthermore, God could, given divine omnipotence, cause Sally to depend on God for her functions conducive to friendship with Madison and that this be a trial-run, so to speak. Having had this experience, Sally would know what it is like. She could then rationally compare the two experiences and decide on that basis. In either case, her participation in horrendous-difference disability<sub>RMWS</sub> is defeated by her beatific vision of God, her acquisition of the long (rationally and morally) wished for human function  $F$ , and her making positive meaning out of her life because of these.

### 3. Horrendous-Difference Disability and Profound Cognitive Disability

There is another subclass of individuals with a cognitive disability who can suffer a horrendous-difference disability. Members of this subclass differ from members of RMWS because they do not in fact have, in this life, any rational moral wishes for some human function  $F$ , nor do they have, in this life, any wishes. (At least, the type of case I am focused on here is one in which there is no evidence that such members have rational moral wishes. It might be that there are in fact no individuals in this subclass; however, it seems likely there is a small percentage of humans in this subclass.) Members of this subclass have a profound or severe cognitive disability. They do not have sophisticated cognitive capacities nor can they acquire them through typical human developmental stages. Like infants, they do not have a self-conception. What blocks the acquisition of these cognitive abilities are certain intrinsic cognitive impairments (despite any extrinsic supportive and caring social context). These intrinsic impairments might be the result of brain trauma that e.g., leaves the individual in a persistent vegetative state; they might be the result of microcephaly, in which an individual has

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<sup>8</sup> For this sort of objection, see (Paul 2014, pp. 5–51).

a smaller than a typical size human brain. Given the intrinsic cognitive impairments and so the absence of sophisticated cognitive capacities, the individual has no *de facto* rational moral wishes.<sup>9</sup> For my purposes, I restrict this subclass to individual humans who have not had any rational moral wishes in this life. Further, given the severity of the cognitive impairment, we would be tempted to believe that such individuals do not have remote or proximate potential for the sophisticated cognitive capacities. There are some exceptions in which an individual has e.g., microcephaly and has rational moral wishes. But what I am focused on here are cases in which one in fact has no rational moral wishes, and hasn't had any rational moral wishes, precisely because of an intrinsic cognitive impairment.

For Adams, recognizing one's own participation in a horrendous-evil is required for one's in fact being a participant in a horrendous-evil. Given this criterion, Adams claims that a "severely brain deficient" individual is not a potential meaning-maker, unlike typical functioning children who are potential meaning-makers because typical functioning children develop into mature adults that have a self-concept and rational moral wishes (cf. Adams 1999, p. 28). Although Adams concedes that severely brain deficient individuals may suffer evils, she denies that they can participate in horrendous evils. They lack the requisite cognitive capacities for meaning-making and lack the potential for the requisite cognitive capacities for meaning-making. Given that actual or potential meaning-making cognitive capacities are required for participation in horrendous evil, it follows that the "severely brain deficient" cannot be participants in horrendous evil.

(It seems fairly evident that individuals with a disability<sub>RMWS</sub> can participate in horrendous evils because of (i)–(iv). They can recognize that their rational moral wish for a human function *F* is thwarted, intrinsically and extrinsically, and so can they recognize on the basis of (i)–(iv) that they have prima facie reason to doubt whether their lives can be a great good to them on the whole.)

Andrew Chignell considers Adams's criterion that one must recognize one's own participation in a horrendous-evil for one to be a participant in a horrendous evil, and extends it to the case of "brutal infanticide that Ivan Karamazov describes in Dostoevsky's classic novel." (Chignell 1998, p. 206) Chignell summarizes Adams's theodicy saying,

A theodicy is only successful, says Adams, if for any person *p* it can offer a logically possible and theologically-sound scenario in which 'God ensures that *p*'s life is a great good to *p* on the whole, and any horrendous evils *p* participates in are made meaningful by being defeated, not merely within the context of the world as a whole, but within the scope of *p*'s individual life. This last move involves a change in perspective. It is not sufficient for theodicy that *God* deem *p*'s life meaningful. Rather, *p* must attribute positive value to her life from an 'internal point of view', where such an attribution involves *p* herself recognizing 'some patterns organizing some chunks of her experiences around goals, ideals, relationships that she stabilizes in valuing'.<sup>10</sup>

Chignell reports that Adams claims that God can defeat an individual's participation in a horrendous evil only if the individual is somehow aware of God while participating in the horrendous evil. The suffering experience itself provides the victim with a vision of the inner life of God. Moreover, the suffering experience itself may provide the victim with a way to identify with the suffering Christ, who was (believed to be) God incarnate. Chignell says, "either way, this *visio dei* is supposed to be of enough (incommensurate) aesthetic value to defeat its correlated horror."<sup>11</sup> After discussing whether the victim has a *de re* or *de dicto* awareness of God during a victim's suffering, Chignell observes that the needed sort of awareness must be *de dicto* awareness because "the victim of a horror must judge or recognize that Something which transcends the suffering is being presented to them *while they are in*

<sup>9</sup> For discussion, cf. (Reinders 2008, pp. 19–24).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. "The Problem of Infant Suffering," pp. 206–7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. "The Problem of Infant Suffering," p. 209.

*the midst of the suffering.*"<sup>12</sup> He then makes the case for the conclusion that infants who die a brutal and gratuitous death, as described by Ivan Karamazov, do not participate in a horrendous evil because:

Infants are generally considered to lack significant moral freedom or agency; they have no second-order desires; they cannot posit ideals for themselves; they have no important values; and they do not preface their actions with moral deliberation. Infants lack the capacity for significant aesthetic appreciation; they cannot feel significantly degraded; they are not aware of the symbolic value that their experiences might have or lack. Infants are not competent language users—they cannot tell themselves or others a narrative about their lives. Children under the age of six months seems to have few concepts and very little sense of self-individuation.<sup>13</sup>

Given infants' lack of such cognitive capacities, Chignell infers that infants who suffer brutal and gratuitous deaths cannot participate in a horrendous evil, as defined by Adams, because they lack the relevant capacities for recognizing their own participation in the suffering.

There is a parallel between infants and their lack of the relevant cognitive capacities for participation in horrendous evil and individuals with profound cognitive disabilities who lack the same relevant cognitive capacities. Like infants, the subclass of individuals with profound cognitive disabilities that I am considering, lack the relevant cognitive capacities for recognizing their own suffering or misfortune. Where the two cases diverge is in developmental psychology. Most infants come to have the relevant cognitive capacities through the course of their life. But for those with profound cognitive disabilities, they do not develop the relevant cognitive capacities through the course of their life. (Again, I am only considering cases in which one in fact does not develop these cognitive capacities.)

Chignell contends that infants who suffer brutal and gratuitous death do not participate in a horrendous evil, given their lack of the relevant cognitive capacities, and so do not require that God defeat their horrendous suffering. Quoting Adams, Chignell suggests that such infant suffering is not horrendous, but rather "a small or medium-scale evil" that "'might simply be over-balanced in a good life'. It is not difficult to imagine that the relatively short-lived physical pain that the infants experience will be balanced out (engulfed!) by the value of *post-mortem* intimacy with God."<sup>14</sup> Chignell goes on to say that

An adult who is in a permanent coma, for instance, would not be susceptible to horrendous suffering (though the events that brought him to that state may constitute a horrendous evil). So we needn't theorize as to how God might be able to defeat his current sufferings or any other that he may undergo after slipping into the coma; we can simply be confident that God will balance them out.<sup>15</sup>

I think that Adams and Chignell are wrong about the stipulated criterion for participation in horrendous evil according to which one must have the requisite meaning-making cognitive capacities during one's suffering or loss of significant meaningful goods in order for that suffering to be horrendous. If I am right about this, then not only must we theorize about how God might defeat infants' brutal and gratuitous suffering that would count as participation in horrendous evil, but so too about how God might defeat the horrendous evils in which those with a profound cognitive disability participate.

My argument for the conclusion that Adams and Chignell are wrong about the stipulated criterion for participation in horrendous evil has two stages. First, we must assume the existence of a God

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. "The Problem of Infant Suffering," pp. 209–10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. "The Problem of Infant Suffering," p. 215.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. "The Problem of Infant Suffering," p. 216.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. "The Problem of Infant Suffering," pp. 216–17.

who is omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, and who defeats (at least) the resurrected saints' participation in horrendous-evils. Given this assumption, we can infer that God would cause the individual, *post-mortem*, to acquire the requisite cognitive abilities for meaning-making. Furthermore, I assume that God would not lie to the individual about their past life, but the individual would be aware of what one has done and what one has undergone in one's past life. If the individual has meaning-making capacities *post-mortem* and is aware of his or her own past participation in significant suffering, *then* (I take it that) the individual has a *prima facie* reason to doubt that his or her life can be a great good for him or her on the whole even though the reason is defeated by God (in the ways indicated above).<sup>16</sup>

The second stage of my argument supports this conditional statement. Chignell would object against this conditional statement by claiming that one must have meaning-making capacities "while [one is] in the midst of the suffering."<sup>17</sup> This seems somewhat intuitive. While one participates in a horrendous evil one loses significant meaningful goods. One's awareness of this significant loss can cause one to experience profound emotions such as pain, lamentation, or despair. Typically, one's participation in the loss of significant meaningful goods is accompanied by one's awareness of this loss and profound emotions (somehow) directed at this loss. But notice that there can be significant temporal gaps between one's losing significant meaningful goods, one's awareness of this loss, and one's profound emotions (somehow) directed at this loss. Adams concedes that an infant can participate in a horrendous evil because she is a potential meaning-maker. That is, an infant can undergo loss of a significant good and later in adolescence come to be aware of the loss of the significant good and experience profound emotions (somehow) directed at the significant loss. The losing of the significant good does not temporally overlap with the individual's awareness of this significant good, but the individual can (much) later become aware of the significant loss and experience profound emotions (somehow) directed at the lost good. More specifically, for Adams, the adolescent may come to recognize her own past vague awareness of God's presence during her past suffering. She can find meaning in her recognizing God's presence with her while she was suffering. So, an infant even without the requisite cognitive capacities while suffering nonetheless has a vague awareness of God's presence with her during her suffering. Chignell reports Adams's concession about infants who are potential meaning-makers, but denies that it is relevant to the case of infants who are murdered. First, Chignell questions whether an infant can have a *de dicto* but vague awareness of God's presence during her suffering; this seems to require sophisticated cognitive capacities, capacities that she lacks at that moment in her life. Second, such infants do not exist later in this life and so do not become aware of their past suffering in this life.

Adams and Chignell proposed that if God is going to defeat an individual's participation in horrendous evil, then one must be at least vaguely aware of God's presence with one while one is suffering. Whereas Adams contends that an infant has vague awareness of God while the infant suffers, Chignell denies that the infant can have a vague awareness of God. Against Adams and Chignell, I do not think that one must be aware of God while one participates in a horrendous evil if God is going to defeat it. Of course, if one is aware of God's presence while one is participating in a horrendous evil, then that is one way God might defeat it for the individual. I do not think this is necessary for defeat because defeat can happen in other ways.

Suppose an individual loses a significant good in her infancy, but is unaware of her loss at that time. She is not aware, even vaguely aware, of God's presence with her when she loses the significant good. If the infant continues to exist through childhood and develops typical cognitive capacities, then

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<sup>16</sup> I assume without argument here, that personal identity through time does not depend on continuity of consciousness, but on something else, e.g., being numerically the same individual substance—that is not assumed by any divine person—through time. For discussion of personhood and why reference to a divine person is relevant, cf. (Williams). For discussion of the denial of continuity of consciousness for personal identity through time, see (Sullivan 2018, pp. 343–63).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. "The Problem of Infant Suffering," p. 210.



she might become aware of her significant past loss and experience profound emotions (somehow) directed at her loss. Suppose further that she has learned about God through her church family, and believes in God. At this point, while she cannot recognize her own past awareness of God when she was suffering because she was not aware of God at that time, nevertheless, she can recognize (believe) that God was with her then. She can, after the fact, have a true belief that God was with her, and this present recognition of God's past (and current) presence to her can defeat her *prima facie* reason for doubting that her life can be a great good for her on the whole. The sort of experience in which one comes to realize that God had been present with one but one was unaware of God's presence, is somewhat a common claim among Christian theologians. For Thomas Aquinas, God causes in some the grace ("infusion of grace") for "partaking of the divine nature" without the individual playing an active causal role in this. This can be without the individual's awareness. For example, when an infant is baptized he or she receives certain theological dispositions from God—even though he or she is currently unaware of God's active presence and has no volitions with regard to God at that time.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, John Calvin speaks of the "secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits." (cf. [Calvin 1960](#), p. 537).

Chignell, however, contends that if an infant is subject to brutal and gratuitous murder in his infancy, then he cannot later come to recognize God's presence with him when he suffered. Chignell says, [...] From a *post-mortem* point of view the beatified saint could very well continue to find

her experience of horrors in this world meaningless, even if she found out that the horror had provided an *opportunity* (which she didn't take) for her to gain insight into the divine nature. Now if the victim was [...] a functional adult when the experience occurred, perhaps she *should* have had an intimate awareness of the Divine, and since it was her fault for missing the opportunity, she should not continue to see the horror as meaningless. My main point is that [...] infants [...] are incapable of having an 'excruciating awareness' or an 'intimate encounter' with either the vague transcendent or God during their victimization. Certain advanced cognitive abilities are required to judge or recognize that one is experiencing *tremendum* or envisioning God; and these are abilities which infants lack. So the beatified infants might well look back on the episode and still find it meaningless. ([Chignell 1998](#), p. 211)

I think Chignell is wrong that a beatified infant cannot look back on her past suffering and find God present with them then. Chignell worries that if one is not aware of God while suffering, then it is a lost opportunity through which one has an "intimate encounter" with God. It is a lost, wasted, or meaningless experience. However, even if the infant had not used the experience of suffering as an opportunity for a meaningful union with God while it was happening, there is no reason the beatified infant cannot use the past suffering as an opportunity now (i.e., in the beatified, *post-mortem* life) to have a more intense union with God in the beatific vision. Given Aquinas's claim that saints can 'see' more or less of God's power (in addition to 'seeing' God), we can say that a beatified infant's awareness of her own past suffering is a *post-mortem* opportunity for a more intense beatific experience; it is an opportunity that is in fact taken. Consequently, we can say that the infant participates in a horrendous evil (that is, her past brutal and gratuitous murder) when she becomes aware of it *post-mortem* and that this horrendous evil is defeated by her all the more intense beatific experience. Contra Chignell, an infant who suffers in this way can be a participant in horrendous evil if God resurrects her from the dead and she becomes aware of her past experience; moreover, God can defeat her participation in horrendous evil by the individual's beatific experience. The individual can, *post-mortem*, be a meaning-maker who believes her life to be overall meaningful given her all-the-more-beatific experience.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. [Aquinas \(n.d.\)](#), *Summa Theologiae* 3, q. 112, a. 1; and, *Summa Theologiae* 3, q. 69, a. 6.

Having described the case of an infant who has no rational moral wishes or awareness when she suffers brutal and gratuitous murder, it seems to me that the same can be said for an individual with a profound cognitive disability. Again, I have in mind individuals who in fact have no rational moral wishes precisely because of a profound cognitive disability. If Chignell were right about infants that are brutally murdered, namely that they cannot participate in horrendous-evils because they lack the requisite cognitive capacities when they suffer, then the same would be said for individuals with a profound cognitive disability. But, given the two-stage argument against Chignell, we have reason to think that not only might such infants participate in horrendous-evils but so too individuals with a profound cognitive disability. Whereas such infants live a short life, here below (so to speak), individuals with a profound cognitive disability might live a much longer life given appropriate social support and caregiving. Individuals with a profound cognitive disability [=disability<sub>PCD</sub>], like the rest of humanity, can participate in horrendous evils in many different ways. For my purposes, I limit myself to a parallel between individuals with a disability<sub>RMWS</sub> and individuals with a disability<sub>PCD</sub>.

Suppose Manuel has a disability<sub>PCD</sub>, has been baptized, and is counted by God among the resurrected saints. Would Manuel have anything to complain about, not having had any rational moral wishes in life before he died? I believe he might. Suppose Manuel, *post-mortem*, rationally wishes that his life had gone differently, that he might have been luckier so as to have had conscious interpersonal relationships with his parents and any caregivers he had. Suppose during Manuel's life there was a certain caregiver, Pedro, who cared deeply for Manuel. But in this life Manuel was unaware of what Pedro did or that Pedro cared for him. Surely, *post-mortem*, Manuel wishes that he had a conscious interpersonal relationship with Pedro. If that is possible, as I think it is, then Manuel (*post-mortem*) is analogous to Sally who has disability<sub>RMWS</sub>. Each of them (i) has a rational wish for a human function *F*; (ii) what each wishes for is morally permissible; (iii) each has an intrinsic impediment that prevents them from being or doing *F*; (iv) each has extrinsic impediments that prevents them from being or doing *F*; and (v) on the basis of (i)–(iv) each has prima facie reason to doubt that his or her own life can be a great good for him or her on the whole. Where they differ is the temporal relation between the act of wishing for a human function *F* and when it is thwarted. For Sally, her wishing for *F* is simultaneous or temporally near to the wish's being thwarted by intrinsic and extrinsic impediments. For Manuel, his wishing for *F* is later than when the wish is thwarted by intrinsic and extrinsic impediments. Manuel would believe, "I wish things had been different. I wish that I had a conscious interpersonal relationship with Pedro." Believing this, Manuel would likely be susceptible to profound emotion (somehow) directed at this state of affairs. Given this experience, Manuel would have a reason to doubt that his life can be a great good for him on the whole. In short, Manuel's being aware of his past, in his *post-mortem* life, is a basis on which he participates in a horrendous evil.

But like Sally, Manuel's participation in horrendous evil can be defeated. Unlike Sally whose cognitive impairment is not so severe that she lacks rational moral wishes in this life, Manuel's cognitive impairment is so severe that he lacks rational moral wishes in this life. Consequently, if God wishes humans to be social creatures, then God would wish Manuel to be social. For this to be made true, God would cause Manuel (*post-mortem*) to lose his severe cognitive impairment and acquire cognitive capacities so that he becomes aware of himself and forms rational moral wishes. According to Christian belief, God is no liar. So, if God is not a liar, then God would allow Manuel to learn of his past—including the fact that he used to be profoundly cognitively disabled. While this would lead to Manuel's participation in horrendous evil (he would have prima facie reason to doubt whether his life can be a great good to him on the whole), his participation in a horrendous evil would be immediately defeated by God because Manuel would experience the beatific vision that organically integrates into Manuel's own understanding of the overall goodness of his own life. But even more, supposing that Pedro, too, is a resurrected saint, then Manuel and Pedro could develop friendship partly based on the past and partly based on present interactions. Individuals who did not share past experiences of events together when the events occurred, nevertheless can bond over remembering those past events together. Just as a beatified infant can come to believe that God was present with her when she was

suffering a horrendous-evil and on the basis of this awareness of God's past presence have a more intense beatific experience, so too could e.g., Manuel have a more intense beatific experience of God, *post-mortem*, based on a belief in God's past presence with him and on a belief in Pedro's past presence with him.

Andrew Chignell tells a different sort of story in order to draw a different conclusion, namely, one must be aware of one's beloved when one suffers, otherwise the presence of the beloved in one's suffering does not make a difference to its being defeated for that individual. I think Chignell misses a crucial point that can be drawn from the story. First, here is the story:

Retrospectively, Roger takes a job in a strange city, and finds the transition very difficult. He misses his old friends, he isn't sure that he likes his job, and the people who live in the apartment above him are extremely noisy. On top of all this, he one day finds himself in a fast-food restaurant that is being held up by vicious gunmen. Roger and a number of other patrons are herded into the walk-in freezer in the back room where they endure several hours in frigid agony and fear before the police rescue them. Roger is traumatized by this event and spends months in counseling. Things start to turn around for him, however, when he meets Susan at an office party. The two of them hit it off, and are soon married.

Retrospectively, Roger looks at the various 'minuses' he encountered upon arriving in the new city as made meaningful by the fact that being in that city was a necessary condition for the big 'plus' of meeting Susan. The episode in the fast-food restaurant, however, sticks out in his mind as a particularly pointless and irresolvable evil. One year into his marriage, he tells Susan about it—even though his therapist had instructed him to repress it (the therapist was paid by the fast-food chain). To Roger's amazement, he finds out that Susan had also been in the restaurant that day, and that she had been in the freezer with him!

Now it seems that even from a post-marital point of view, Roger could continue to find this participation in the fast-food evil pointless and irresolvable, despite the fact that the person he now loves and enjoys more than anything in the world was, without his knowledge, present with him throughout that experience. Roger would not, even upon this later recognition, find that suffering ultimately meaningful. After all, he was not (self-consciously) *aware* of Susan's presence in the freezer (even though he may have touched her!), and the episode was not the occasion for their meeting each other.<sup>19</sup>

I think that a point Chignell fails to draw from this story is this. Roger, having had this experience of robbery, and Susan, having been present with Roger during this experience of robbery, can now (after the fact) remember the robbery together. This would, I believe, make the union between Roger and Susan even stronger than if they did not remember the robbery together. While they did not share the experience together in a meaningful way when it occurred in the past, they can now share in remembering the experience together in a meaningful way. What redeems or defeats that past participation in suffering is the remembering together of that past suffering. Given that Susan was there, Roger experiences the remembering of that event with her in a more intimate way than if he simply reported a past experience to her and she was sympathetic toward him. It is unnecessary that they had been aware of each other's presence during the robbery in order that they later form an intimate union in part by means of each of their experience of the robbery. What matters is that *de facto* each was present at the time, and later they form a yet more intimate union in remembering that past event together.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. "The Problem of Infant Suffering," pp. 210–11.

Likewise, for those with a profound cognitive disability in this life, they can later (*post-mortem*) form more intimate friendships with other resurrected saints on the basis of their collectively being aware of past events that were *de facto* shared. Even though e.g., Manuel had been unaware of Pedro (or anything?), he can later (*post-mortem*) form a deeper friendship with Pedro because they can be aware of past events that each had participated in. Manuel can later (*post-mortem*) be aware of Pedro's having been a great caregiver who had extended the hand of friendship even though Manuel had been impeded from being aware of this. On the basis of this (*post-mortem*) awareness, Manuel and Pedro can become even better friends. Likewise, just as Manuel was unaware of Pedro's presence with him, so too was Manuel unaware of God's presence with him. Nevertheless, in Manuel's coming to learn of God's past presence with him, this is a basis on which Manuel forms an even more intense beatific experience of God because he may 'see' more of God than if his earthly life had gone differently.

I suspect that Chignell's analysis goes wrong in an assumption that bears on the interpretation of the story about Roger. What seems to matter to Chignell is when, exactly, the horrendous event occurs and when one is aware of the beloved's presence to one in that horrendous event. If Roger were aware of Susan's presence when the horrific event occurred, then Chignell indicates that the event might be made meaningful for Roger. However, it seems to me that what underlies this analysis is a time-bias, specifically, a near-bias. If one has a near-bias then one prefers goods in the present or near to the present and prefers bad things or pains either in the past or in the distant future. If we hypothesize that Chignell assumes a near-bias that (partly) determines his analysis, then this predicts that Chignell would infer from the story that Roger simply prefer to be aware of Susan's presence while he suffers (Susan's presence being a good for Roger) rather than at a later time. This is Chignell's interpretation. But suppose our analysis is not time-biased, but assumes temporal-neutrality. If one is temporally-neutral, then one prefers goods in one's life and the temporal location of the goods, as such, does not determine why one prefers to have the goods at the time one has them. Rather, reasons other than mere temporal location would be the basis on which one prefers to have the goods when one has them. While it is outside the scope of this paper to argue for time-neutrality, I am persuaded by arguments for it by Meghan Sullivan and others (cf. [Greene and Sullivan 2015](#); [Sullivan 2017, 2018](#); [Finocchiaro and Sullivan 2016](#)). With temporal-neutrality as an assumption in our analysis of the story of Roger, we would not stipulate that Roger must be aware of Susan's presence with him while he is suffering in order for Roger's suffering to be defeated. Rather, we would say that what is required is that Roger at some time in his life be aware of Susan's presence with him when he was suffering and that their remembering together this past experience is a basis on which they form a more intimate and meaningful union that defeats each of their participation in the horrific event.

If we assume time-neutrality in our analysis of how God might defeat horrendous-difference disabilities<sub>RMWS</sub> and horrendous-difference disabilities<sub>PCD</sub>, then we do not need to posit (as Adams and Chignell do) that one *must* be aware of God's presence with one while one is participating in a horrendous evil. Rather, what is required is that at some time in one's life, whether in this life or *post-mortem*, that one be aware of God's presence when one participated in a horrendous evil.

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