

# Demiurge and Deity: The Cosmical Theology of Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the nature of the Star Maker in Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*, as well as Stapledon's exploration of the theological problem of evil, as compared with philosophical conceptions of God and their respective theodicies in the tradition of classical theism, as propounded by philosophers such as Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Maimonides, Aquinas, and Avicenna. It argues that Stapledon's philosophical divergence from classical theism entails that the Star Maker of the novel is more demiurge than true divinity, and that this divergence is integral to the basically amoral character of the Star Maker, as well as the purely aesthetic resolution of the problem of evil articulated in *Star Maker*. This analysis, in turn, will hopefully bear on future studies touching on the trope of quasi-divinities, evolved and contingent gods, present in the work of other SF authors.

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## Introduction

Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950) stands out among science fiction authors of the first half of the twentieth century not only for having substantively influenced writers whose work helped ground the emergence of the genre's "golden age"—Arthur C. Clark and Isaac Asimov having both expressed their conceptual debt to him—but also for having been a philosopher with an established academic career before turning to SF to translate his thought to the public.<sup>1</sup> His novels thus depict, in a stunningly imaginative form, the essentially philosophical speculations that were first intimated in such works as his dissertation, *A Modern Theory of Ethics* (1929), and well-encapsulated in his later lecture, "Interplanetary Man" (1948). In such writings, he presents as the highest ethical aim the progressive evolution of humankind as a sublime "spirit" dialectically proceeding toward a

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke wrote of Stapledon's *First and Last Men* that "[n]o book before or since ever had such an impact on [his] imagination" and that Stapledon "changed [his] whole outlook on the universe" ("Of Sand and Stars," 12), while Asimov credited Stapledon's work as featuring the kind of future history, of vast cosmic scope, that later came to so define the *Foundation* series (*I. Asimov*, 116). In the larger realm of ideas, Freeman Dyson has credited Stapledon as the actual source of the idea of the Dyson Sphere (quoted in Wacquez, 190)—a testament to the fecundity of Stapledon's imaginative mind.

state of ever richer community and unity, intellectual life and selfless love. Defining the good as the “fulfilment or progressive fulfilling of the activities of teleologically active substances” (*Ethics*, 88), Stapledon writes that the “ideal is that the whole universe should achieve organism, and progressively fulfil its capacity upon the highest of all emergent levels,” and adds that “the only way for us as a race to serve in this cosmical task is to strive to organize our tiny planet and facilitate . . . the development of ever richer, subtler and more unified mind” (245). In this and similar passages, composed for an academic audience, Stapledon reveals his cosmical vision of human potential, one first conceived in purely philosophic terms, but eminently suited, in being cosmical, to translate into the literary imagination of SF.

While in *First and Last Men* (1930) Stapledon tracks the development of the spirit<sup>2</sup> through a future history, across two billion years, of eighteen species of the genus *homo*, in *Star Maker* (1937)—which has been credited as his masterpiece (Sawyer, 207)—he expands his narrative vision to recount the half a trillion years of the total cosmos and its panoply of sapient life. To this end, the novel presents the first-person perspective of an unnamed Englishman who, at a poignant moment in his life, ponders the enrapturing immensity of the night sky, only to find himself suddenly out of his body and living as a point of pure consciousness. Unrestricted by the flesh, he begins a cosmic sojourn that takes him to observe a planet and an intelligent species (“the Other Men”) much like our own and, like our own, involved in a crisis of spiritual and civilizational import. Although the Other Men ultimately and tragically collapse, the narrator is telepathically joined by the consciousness of one of their kind, the philosopher Bvalltu, as he continues his journey through space, and later through time, to observe myriad species traverse the stages of social and spiritual evolution toward enlightened unity—from primitive tribalism and petty nationalism to planetary community and interstellar civilization—even while the narrator’s band of disembodied minds expands to include many more awakened individuals of other species.

This group eventually beholds the consummation of a vast universal drama when, after many individual failures and tragedies of civilization, all the galaxies that had attained a unitive collective consciousness themselves join to form a cosmic mind, a union of all mental life in which the narrator himself is subsumed. This cosmic mind, itself a godlike intelligence at the peak of its lucidity, at last encounters, in a transcendent vision, what had long been the object of its, and the narrator’s, searching and wonder: the eponymous Star Maker—a being that through the timeless eons of its existence had created countless universes, conforming to different laws, and ultimately fashioned the universe of the novel—one that had been destined to evolve to a state of near deity and thus become an exquisite object of its maker’s contemplation.

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<sup>2</sup> Stapledon’s “spirit,” is a term, as Rutledge notes, “always difficult to define in his works,” which “at times seems congruent with its traditional religious meanings, but at other times it seems to be an idealized abstraction of human moral qualities” (275). In one sense, as revealed over the course of *Star Maker*, the spirit is the good as embodied in the dialectical and progressive unfolding of consciousness in cosmos.

Throughout the novel, as the narrator surveys the destinies of the multifarious species of the universe and their ultimate fate of either extinction or apotheosis, he grapples with two overarching questions: What is the fundamental cause of existence, and what is the ultimate status of value, of meaning in that existence? *Is there a creator, a Star Maker, a transcendent mind who has authored the cosmos and—if so—to what end has it created, with what attitude does it contemplate its works, and does it have a nature, beyond creative energy, that is at essence benevolence and love and able, as such, to ground the objective reality of the good and endow the soul's movement toward the good with any eternal significance?* This same narrator correspondingly wonders throughout the work why such a Star Maker—if it exists—should permit, or even ordain, evil in its creation, and suffering, futility, loss for innumerable conscious beings, even galactic civilizations. Why should the Star Maker likewise be the Star Destroyer (117)?

The narrator's own intellectual ambiguity reflects the "pious agnosticism" Stapledon himself professed. Stapledon is piously dedicated to "the spirit," yet agnostic with respect to its objective and ultimate ontological status; while he insists that the spirit must be worshipped "with one or other of the two religious feelings [praise or horror], or both at once," he avers that "loyalty to the spirit itself," the intellectual integrity it entails, requires "that our piety remains always agnostic piety" (qt. in Rutledge, 275). He therefore doubts, for all his worship, whether this spirit, and the goodness it entails, has a supreme metaphysical ground or significance. Consequently, that the narrator, during his union and near apotheosis with the cosmical mind, does behold the Star Maker and discern something of its nature, is evidently in the vein of an *agnostic*, speculative, exploratory, and fictive, though meaningful, answer to these theological inquiries.

The intellectual drama of *Star Maker*, therefore, lies in how it grapples, in the spirit of "pious agnosticism," with two essentially philosophical questions—the metaphysical and ethical significance of the origin of being, on the one hand, and of the ontological status of value, on the other. The novel thus presents itself as a philosophical text, and in that light this paper will discuss the metaphysical and theological implications of Stapledon's presentation of the existence and the nature of the Star Maker and its relation to the good.

To examine the nature, metaphysical and moral, of Stapledon's Star Maker, this paper will analyze it against the conception of God as philosophically defined in the multifarious tradition of classical theism—as propounded by thinkers such as Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Maimonides, and Avicenna. It will ultimately argue that the Star Maker is far more a finite demiurge than true and absolute divinity, and that Stapledon's philosophical divergence from the classical conception of God explains the Star Maker's basically amoral character, as well as the purely aesthetic resolution of the problem of evil articulated in *Star Maker*. This analysis, in turn, will hopefully bear on future studies touching on the trope of quasi-divinities, evolved and contingent gods, present in the work of other SF authors.

## Part One: The Star Maker and His Works

### 1.1 Intimations of the Star Maker

As introduced above, the narrator of *Star Maker* does mystically apprehend the presence of the Star Maker at the consummation of his cosmic mode of consciousness, in the closing sections of the novel. Nonetheless, for most of the book he only searches for and ponders over the question of the Star Maker, while exploring the diverse species, cultures, civilizations, and even times of the cosmos, within an intimately corporate band of disembodied personalities. The narrator, in intellectual union with his companions, thus muses at one point:

... another question was becoming increasingly insistent. Our crowded experiences in the many worlds, and our new lucidity of mind, had bred in each of us a sharp conflict of intellect and feeling. Intellectually the idea that some "deity," distinct from the cosmos itself, had made the cosmos now seemed to us less and less credible. Intellectually we had no doubt the cosmos was self-sufficient, a system involving no logical ground and no creator. Yet increasingly ... we felt in the physical presence of the cosmos the psychical presence of that which we named the Star Maker. In spite of intellect, we knew that the whole cosmos was infinitely less than the whole of being, and that the whole infinity of being underlay every moment of the cosmos ... we strove constantly to peer behind each minute particular event in the cosmos to see the very features of that infinity which, for lack of a truer name, we had called the Star Maker. (99)

In this significant passage, the intellectual doubt that a deity exists, "distinct from the cosmos itself," directly reflects Stapledon's own agnostic position. But however much Stapledon may well have thought that the cosmos was "self-sufficient" and a "system involving no logical ground and no creator," there is a suspicion here that there is something that transcends the domain of nature, that there exists a supernatural realm of being. Stapledon has his narrator express something rather like his own pious mentality: in spite of intellect, he knows, or rather feels, that the "whole cosmos was infinitely less than the whole of being." In this quest for what is beyond the finite sphere of existence apprehensible to the mind, the corporate band attempts to discern the nature of an infinity, which they call the Star Maker.

The name, in this case, is fitting. At this junction of the novel, the narrator almost posits a vague cause of the finite world, or at least a reality that transcends the physical cosmos, as intuitively suspected, though not discursively deduced. Yet he abstains from asserting that the Star Maker has any substantively personal nature, or any attribute with which it can be readily identified. Stapledon thus construes it here as an indeterminate maker, in the barest outline as the generative source of finite being, while the material realm is referenced by the synecdoche of "star," as appropriate in an SF work. The Star Maker, being surmised and not seen, eludes conceptualization. Accordingly, the narrator, speaking as the "we" of psychic union with other disembodied explorers of the cosmos, states:

Sometimes we inclined to conceive it as sheer Power . . . Sometimes we felt assured that it was pure Reason . . . Sometimes Love seemed to us its essential character . . . But equally it appeared to us as unreasoning Creativity, at once blind and subtle, tender and cruel, caring only to spawn and spawn the infinite variety of beings, conceiving here and there among a thousand inanities a fragile loveliness . . . But we knew well that all these fictions were very false. The felt presence of the Star Maker remained unintelligible . . . (99)

The above is an important concession. "The felt presence" of the Star Maker is real, but the narrator rejects as false the diverse conceptions of the transcendent reality of the Star Maker, as being projections from the contingent perspective of a limited mind.

This idea was earlier introduced in *Star Maker* with the discussion of the Other Men, residents of the Other Earth. Since their dominant sense modality is smell, this contingent peculiarity conditions them to conceive of God in olfactory and gustatory terms, with more or less sophistication and measure of abstraction. In a passage of wry parody, Stapledon writes:

I must begin by explaining that in the development of religion on the Other Earth gustatory sensation had played a very great part . . . descriptions of God's power, his wisdom, his justice, his benevolence, were accompanied by descriptions of his taste. In mystical literature God was often likened to an ancient and mellow wine . . . Other teachers declared that, though God was indeed tasty, it was not through any bodily instrument but to the naked spirit that his essence was revealed . . . Some went so far as to declare that God should be thought of not as a person at all but as actually *being* this flavour. (38)

Beyond the parody, we see here a philosopher's caution about conceiving of a transcendent reality in a manner conditioned by all too contingent, and all too human, concepts. In the above, Stapledon has the reader consider analogs of the various conceptions of the deity familiar on Earth, from the purely anthropomorphic tasty God to the suprapersonal divinity identical to supreme flavor itself, the latter being closest to the concept of God in classical theism, however conditioned by incidental gustatory preoccupations. However humorous, in this parody a doubt as to the Star Maker's goodness and moral valence is foreshadowed. If the Star Maker transcends human conceptualization, does it not follow that it must similarly transcend human values, human morals, human conceptualizations of the good?

Stapledon develops this suspicion in describing his narrator's horrified response to the destruction of civilizations throughout the galaxy and, later on, tragedies general to the cosmos. The first instance of such recognition of profound suffering, seeming futility, and natural evil appears in the description of the ultimate annihilation of the Other Men; despite many cycles of glorious ascent and ignominious decline, they finally undergo a societal and technological collapse just as an ineluctable thinning of their atmosphere renders any opportunity for recovery impossible. This occurrence disturbs the narrator's optimism; having once imagined that the eventual destiny of humankind must be one of unassailable peace and triumph, he gleans from the sad fate of the Other Men that no such "slow but glorious awakening of the human spirit," his one sure consolation, is at all

guaranteed for his, or really any, race. To him it therefore seems that “the universe, or the maker of the universe, must be indifferent to the fate of worlds” (45). Though the narrator is not so sensitive as to regard the presence of any suffering, struggle, and waste as repugnant, since they are “the soil in which the spirit grew,” he does think the fact that “all struggle should be finally, absolutely vain, that a whole world of sensitive spirits fail and die, must be sheer evil,” and so it seems to him that “[h]ate must be the Star Maker” (45).

Yet at this early stage of the novel, Stapledon is careful to add a qualification through the character (the only named one, incidentally) of Bvalltu. Bvalltu, a philosopher of the Other Men, who joins the ever-increasing collective consciousness of exploring, disembodied minds, rather expresses an acquiescent and ultimately pious, though agnostic, equanimity. “Oh, Star Maker,” he exclaims, “. . . [e]ven if you waste and torment all your lovely worlds, the little figments of your imagination, yet I must praise you. For if you do so, it must be right. In me it would be wrong, but in you it *must* be right.” Bvalltu nonetheless concludes his argument with a far more ambiguous, but essentially Stapledonian, statement: “But if there is no Star Maker, what can it be that I praise? I do not know. I call it only the sharp tang and flavor of existence. But to call it this is to say little” (45).

Nonetheless, the poignant sense of the *gratuitous* plenitude of evil and arbitrary futility, made more keenly tragic set against the beauties of the universe, is the dominant note of Stapledon’s work, a note that becomes increasingly strident as the scope of the narrator’s vision enlarges. Although the narrator’s cosmos, in *Star Maker*, is set on a teleological progression toward the supreme moment when the highest beings across the galaxies of the universe attain a telepathic unity, this very moment involves consciousness of its imperfect nature, an awareness of the many failed beings—individual, planetary, interplanetary, galactic—who perished in vanity. When the narrator finally unites and is one with the cosmical mind, containing in itself the total united consciousness of all utopian galaxies—including the Milky Way—he thinks despite the exultation of cosmic intellection: “The mystery, the futility, the horror of existence now bore down upon me most cruelly. For to me, the spirit of that little band of awakened galaxies, surrounded by unawakened and doomed hordes in the last day of the cosmos, there appeared no hope of triumph anywhere” (151). Moreover, from the point of view of the united cosmical consciousness, the billions of years of the universe are comparatively short, and the inevitable end, as determined by the entropic law, is horridly near.

Stapledon, not content with merely contemplating the evils and futilities of terrestrial existence, expands and magnifies the problem to a literally cosmic scale. It is therefore on such a universal scale that Stapledon, the philosopher, contemplates the problem of evil: if there is a God, omnipotent and omnibenevolent, who created the universe, how could it logically contain such seemingly gratuitous evil? Beyond the events of *Star Maker*, Stapledon no doubt was considering not only the wrongs done on Earth, but the ultimate heat death of the real universe, and even the profoundly futile emptiness of interstellar and intergalactic space. Such a universe as we observe, Stapledon seems to suggest, could not have proceeded from divine intellect, or else not from a supreme mind that is, in essence, goodness and love, exhibiting unalloyed solicitude towards its creatures. It almost seems, however, that the idea of an indifferently malevolent God, unconcerned

with the human values of love and goodness—much less identical to love and goodness itself—is more troubling, for Stapledon, than a universe with simply no deity, “no logical ground and no creator.” The narrator and his corporate band of minds nonetheless inure themselves to both possibilities earlier in the novel:

We came to wonder whether, in demanding lordship of the universe for the divinely humane spirit that we prized most in ourselves and in our fellow-mortals in all the worlds, we were perhaps impious . . . we said to one another, “If the Star Maker is Love, we know that this must be right. But if he is not, if he is some other, some inhuman spirit, *this* must be right. And if he is nothing, if the stars and all else are not his creatures but self-subsistent, and if the adored spirit is but an exquisite creature of our minds, then *this* must be right, this and no other possibility. (73-74)

Since such grave musings pervade *Star Maker*, it is only natural—though there is lucidity and preternatural wisdom in the cosmic mind of the united galactic utopias Stapledon envisions—that its every happiness is bitter-sweet, for it feels itself to be “abortive” and “crippled,” insofar as in its very adolescence it must prepare for death, the entropic end. Consequently, in *Star Maker* the ecstasies are enlarged only to be equaled by the tragedies. Nonetheless, the cosmic mind, at the moment of the maximum degree of united lucidity of all enlightened beings in the universe, at last perceives the brooding presence of the Star Maker, whose nature, however obscurely, is revealed in the dénouement of the novel.

## 1.2 A Bitter Beatitude

“In the supreme moment of the cosmos, I, as the cosmical mind, seemed to myself to be confronted with the source and the goal of all finite things” (160). Thus writes Stapledon, in the sublime tones of mystical experience, of the narrator’s first apprehension of the Star Maker. This coming into the presence of the Maker does seem to be a “beatitude,” yet something of its bitterness becomes subtly apparent as the description of the Star Maker, and of its works, is developed in chapters 13, 14, and 15, the novel’s last before the epilogue. Stapledon, of course, is careful, as he always is, to caution the reader that his own words are woefully limited and deficient in relation to the actual experience—“barren and trivial are these words” (161)—which might well contemplate a straightforward critical reading of the *Star Maker*. Nonetheless, for our purposes here, it is necessary to analyze what Stapledon *does* say of the Star Maker, despite his own recognition of the flaws inherent to a cataphatic description of the transcendent.

The first important datum, significant throughout the pen portrait of the Star Maker, is that it has “two aspects.” One relates to the particular creative and even temporally self-limiting mode by which it interacts with a given universe it has created (for it has created innumerable), while the other is what Stapledon calls (*italics mine*) “the eternally *achieved* perfection of absolute spirit” (161). This use of the word *achieved*, at so early a juncture, significantly implies that the Star Maker has a mode in which it does need something, that it has some deficiency in its being such that, in its inmost essence, it is not the eternal perfection of absolute spirit *simpliciter*, but has somehow changed or been conditioned so

as to attain this state. Indeed, there seems to be something of a metaphysical contradiction here. That which is achieved cannot be absolute, for the simple reason that any achievement is necessarily *conditioned* by its own prerequisites, and is relative to another possible state.

As the encounter deepens, the narrator discovers, to his profound dismay, that the Star Maker regards him who is the consciousness of a whole created cosmos, not with godly love, but the "aloof though passionate attention of an artist," as its gaze anatomizes him, dismisses his imperfections and absorbs, for its "own enrichment," "all the little excellence" that this, the living and percipient cosmos, had attained (164). There is a troubling implication in this description of the Star Maker as an artist, an artist who created a world to become enriched by it, and to explore the potentiality of its own creative power. If this is so, the Star Maker did not create for the sake of the creature, but for its own sake. It is not as though the creature, having done nothing before its existence to merit the joy of being, was graciously bestowed life from a divinity who essentially needs nothing in return, but wills *only* the good of that creature (as is the normative view of classical theism). Instead, the creature, not an end in itself, is a means to the satisfaction and edification of its Maker. But that this Maker should itself have an end, something it wants to get or to learn from what it has made, signals that it is basically imperfect in its own being. Accordingly, the Star Maker, in not willing the good of its creature, only wills the good of itself, and stands deficient in relation to that end.

It is little wonder, then, that the narrator should, after having realized the intentions of the Star Maker, cry out against it as "ruthless." He subsequently retracts this execration, however, in the acquiescent acceptance that the virtue of the creature cannot be the virtue of the creator, and that he, the cosmical mind, is happy to have been used as the rough sketch of a better, and more perfect, design (164). The narrator's earlier question, whether the values of love and charity so precious to human beings and other forms of sentient life are grounded in the being of the ground of all being, seems here decisively answered. Stapledon earlier stated that to love is "to will the self-fulfillment of the beloved, and to find, in the very activity of loving, an incidental but vitalizing increase of oneself" (61). Stapledon's account of love here has a significant corollary in the definition provided by Thomas Aquinas, the great Scholastic and classical theist philosopher. Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologica*, writes that to love something is nothing else than to will the good to that thing. He reasons, therefore, that since God wills existence to all that has being, and since the goodness of anything pertains to the actuality of its existence, it follows that God *loves* all things, in willing their good. Here, the "self-fulfillment" of Stapledon is mirrored in Aquinas' understanding of the good, insofar as self-fulfillment implies perfected existence, even as Aquinas conceptualizes the good as integral to being itself and its perfection: "all existing things, in so far as they exist," Aquinas states, "are good, since the being of a thing is itself a good, and likewise, whatever perfection it possesses" (1.20.2). Love is essentially selfless, therefore, for both Aquinas and Stapledon, because it involves willing the good of another, and not willing existence for another solely for the sake of an end proper to oneself. Stapledon thus speaks of the *incidental* vitalizing of oneself in loving, even as Aquinas writes: "A lover is placed outside himself and made to pass into the object of his love in so far as he wills good to the beloved" (1.20.2).



Consequently, the difference between Stapledon and Aquinas here is not in how they conceptualize love. The difference is their ascription of love to the deity. Fuller implications of this will be treated in the subsequent section, but for now it is sufficient to note that, for Stapledon, to say that the Star Maker does not love is just to say that the Star Maker—terrifyingly—never wills the good of another for the sake of that other. The purpose of its creative act, therefore, does not lie in granting being to what cannot exist of itself and thus in performing an act of incomprehensible charity and benevolence. Rather, in not loving, the Star Maker cannot will the existence of any creature except insofar as the existence of that creature is a means to an entirely distinct, and necessarily self-directed, object of its will. What, however, is the precise object of the Star Maker's will, the purpose behind its creating so many universes? It must somehow lie, as quoted above, in its own enrichment, in which case it would seem to have some species of self-love. Such ever remains the operative intention in the Star Maker's creation of many worlds.

As Stapledon describes, in chapter 14, the innumerable and progressively more sophisticated worlds of the Star Maker—which it views at once temporally and atemporally—we read some of the most inventive and fantastic passages of *Star Maker*. Though it is not within the scope of this essay to analyze the characterizations of these worlds, the essential point is that, from the perspective of the Star Maker's particular and self-limiting creative aspect, it goes through a process of forming "immature worlds," then moderately developed ones (to which our cosmos belongs), to mature ones and ultimately a supreme cosmos. Strangely, as the Star Maker considers the united cosmical mind of this most excellent world and comes into intimate communion with it, it seemingly attains or *achieves* that perfect and eternal state of being earlier described, and this mode is begotten in its very union with its chief creation. Stapledon writes:

And the Star Maker, that dark power and lucid intelligence, found in the concrete loveliness of his creature the fulfillment of desire. And in the mutual joy of the Star Maker and the ultimate cosmos was conceived, most strangely, the absolute spirit itself, in which all times are present and all being is comprised; for the spirit which was the issue of this union confronted my reeling intelligence as being at once the ground and the issue of all temporal and finite beings. (182-183)

It seems, then, that the temporally limited and creative aspect of the Star Maker generated these countless worlds in order to conceive, with the ultimate cosmos, that eternally contemplative aspect of itself, which is paradoxically the ground of all finite things—since it considers them from a perspective outside the particular time sequences of any one world—as well as their totality and issue; in this latter sense the eternally *achieved* perfection of the ostensibly absolute spirit is in fact dependent on the sum of all created things for its very existence and character. It is almost like a man's going back in time in order to beget his father, so his father can beget him in turn.

In response to this metaphysical paradox of the Star Maker, Stanislaw Lem—himself an eminent SF author with philosophic leanings—has rather insightfully noted the logical inconsistency of *Star Maker's* theology, and therefore it is worth considering a substantial passage from him:

This Highest Being had Its own callow youth, during which, playing at creation, It constructed a multitude of "unsuccessful" universes, as it were. In different stages of Its life, good and evil elements collided within It with different results, as did also Its tendencies toward active intervention in Its creations and passive contemplation of their processes. This is the concept of the Developing God, which necessarily assumes the original imperfection of the god. It implies the existence of laws to which the Creator of the Cosmos is subject, since if It can develop and mature, then It Itself could not have given itself these qualities. Stapledon therefore turns out to be mystical system-builder, although the logical character of his system is quite dubious. (2)

Lem rightly implies that for the Star Maker to be at all conditioned by finite things, for it to have a character somehow composed of the totality of its own creations, for it to change or to develop through an evolutionary process, and for it to have various potentialities more or less fulfilled, necessitates that it is neither absolute nor necessarily existent of itself. Accordingly, the Star Maker, no matter how exalted it is in its mode of eternal contemplation, must be at essence a contingent being, and not truly absolute, independent, and unconditioned.

And since the Star Maker is at heart dependent on what it creates, because it is in some way the ultimate product of all finite existence, and only retroactively seeds existence and observes it from a semi-atemporal perspective, it is not meaningfully distinct from the multiverse itself, and hardly seems to exist as or within an ontologically independent and absolute realm. Consequently, the Star Maker or the multiverse, assuming that they are ultimately indistinguishable, seems to have "pulled itself up from the bootstraps." The Star Maker/World is self-sufficient, and yet there is no reason, given its inherently contingent and conditioned nature, to suppose that it really can be self-sufficient. Again, as Lem noted, since the Star Maker/World composite is evolving and its parts mutually dependent, it is subject to laws of evolution and dynamic progression of which it itself cannot be the source. The Star Maker, therefore, cannot logically explain or ground itself, much less, in an ultimate sense, the world of which it is supposedly the creator.

The consequences of this bootstraps paradox *vis-à-vis* the Star Maker's true divinity will be addressed in Part Two. For now, I will conclude this section by showing what the Star Maker's nature and creative work imply for the problem of evil, so important to Stapledon in the earlier parts of the novel. Though it is ultimately difficult to distinguish the Star Maker from the multiverse itself as a totality, or rather as consummated in the supreme cosmos, the Star Maker clearly *is* distinguishable from the innumerable individual beings within the multiverse and their discrete centers of consciousness. And towards them it has a troubling attitude. Though Stapledon admits that there is love in the Star Maker—to the extent that its creatures love and live, even as it observes and assesses them all at once from its atemporal perspective—Stapledon is definite in his assertion that contemplation alone, and not love, is ultimate in the temper of the eternal spirit. It even has a "cruel delight in the contemplation of every horror, and glee in the downfall of the virtuous. All passions, it seemed, were comprised within the spirit's temper; but mastered, icily gripped within the cold, clear, crystal ecstasy of contemplation" (183). Manifestly,

then, the Star Maker truly does not “will the good of another,” as we earlier saw. Insofar as its eternal aspect of total contemplation depends on its creatures, it values and creates them for the sake of that end, in relation to which it is still deficient. But insofar as these creatures exist in themselves, as individuals, they are utterly irrelevant to the Star Maker’s creative act and the real purpose of that act. It creates solely for the end of its own self-satisfying—at times vindictive—fulfillment, which at once demonstrates not only its inherent finitude and limitation but also its essentially selfish character.

With regard to the problem of evil, then, Stapledon’s answer is clear. There is evil in the world because the Star Maker *wills* evil. Just as the artist in composing a tragedy, without any concern for the individual welfare of his or her characters, subjects them to every ill and misfortune for the sake of a beauty arising from the textured totality of the experience thus represented, the Star Maker inflicts evil on its creatures in order to experience and to become enriched by a hypercosmical comedic tragedy. Accordingly, the Star Maker includes, even in the supreme cosmos, beings of a cosmic stature that are ultimately damned, for the Star Maker withholds from them the beatific vision of its union with the united consciousness of the supreme cosmos. At this, the narrator is utterly horrified. “Even if the misery I had glimpsed,” he writes, “was in fact but a few dark strands woven into the golden tapestry to enrich it . . . yet such desolation of awakened spirits . . . ought not, ought never to be” (182). There is no hint here that the Star Maker, for ultimately benevolent reasons, merely *permits* evil, and politely respects the freewill decisions of its autonomous creatures, for whom it wills only good. The Star Maker seems rather to positively *will* evil, and for a fundamentally aesthetic aim, in order to add to the depth and texture of its own contemplative experience. Thus, there is evil in the world not to add to the full measure of the good, but only to enrich, with the sharp tang of poignant tragedy, the beauty of existence apparent from a wholly alien, aloof, dispassionate, and horribly clinical intelligence. The problem of evil is thus solved, not with reference to any moral vindication of the Star Maker, but by appeal to pure aesthetics. “That this should be the upshot of all our lives! This scientist’s, no, artist’s, keen appraisal!” (183).

## Part Two: God and the Star Maker

### 2.1 Demiurge or Deity?

In section 1.2, we considered the metaphysical problems associated with Stapledon’s description of the Star Maker, as well as the aesthetic resolution to the problem of evil, variously expressed throughout *Star Maker*. The questions that remain are (1) whether there is a meaningful sense according to which the Star Maker should be understood as God, and (2) how the answer to this question in turn relates to the treatment of the problem of evil in *Star Maker*.

By a superficial metric, the Star Maker, as the creator of not one but even many universes, should be more or less identified with the God classically recognized in the theological and philosophical traditions of the great monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—as well as certain pagan thinkers of early and late antiquity, such as Aristotle and Plotinus, and perhaps even among monotheistic schools of Hinduism, such as

Dvaita Vedanta, espoused by Madhvacharya. A closer analysis, however, reveals the stark disparity between the metaphysical view of God articulated in classical theism and the Star Maker described by Stapledon.

This is because God in these traditions is generally conceived as metaphysically ultimate in every respect. He is, in the first place, necessarily existent of himself, dependent on no other. As Avicenna, the preeminent figure in Islamic philosophy, argues in the “Metaphysics” of his compendium *ash-Shifā*, God’s essence, unlike any contingently existent being, just *is* his existence, such that his essence is identical to pure and absolute existence; consequently, God depends on nothing else, whatsoever, in order to exist (274-276). Stressing the selfsame point, the Christian theologian Aquinas, whom we considered earlier, likewise insists in the *Summa Theologica* that “God is His own being,” that it is his very essence “to exist,” such that he can neither *not* exist nor depend on any cause in order to exist (1.3.5). In the same vein, the most illustrious and representative philosopher of the Jewish tradition, Maimonides, explains in his *Guide for the Perplexed* that in God “existence and essence are perfectly identical,” for “He is not a substance to which existence is joined as an accident, as an additional element. His existence is always absolute, and has never been a new element or an accident in Him” (1.57). Having reasoned that God is essentially transcendent and unconditioned being, Avicenna, Aquinas, and Maimonides deduce that God is pure actuality; God is of himself wholly actual being, such that he has no potentialities that could be realized, and thus he cannot be subject to any change or alteration, or be anything other than the full perfection implied by constant and unconditioned existence—as Aristotle himself, some one and a half millennia before, had argued regarding his own God (whom he calls the Unmoved Mover) in the twelfth book of his *Metaphysics* (1072b15-1072b30).

From this notion of unconditioned existence and actuality, theistic philosophers have traditionally argued that other and evidently divine, ultimate attributes are logical concomitants of the reality of God thus described, such as immutability, oneness, eternity, and intellection. In himself pure and perfectly actual being, God, they have argued, cannot change; he is thus immutable, as mentioned above. Immune to change, he is entirely unbound by time; he is thus, in addition, eternal. Essentially independent of all other things, God cannot be composed of parts, for he would then depend upon those parts, and some cause to make them cohere, in order to exist; he is therefore *simple* or incomposite and, as such, complete unity. Change and composition being inherent to material reality, he must transcend all matter; he is consequently immaterial. And since the sole activity of existence proper to immaterial being is that of intellection, God could only be infinite intellect and conscious will, and not a brute, dumb force. And lastly, insofar as only things instantiating a higher type or *genus* can be multiple in number, it follows under classical theism that God, who must surpass type or genus entirely, can only be one, and that there cannot, even in principle, be multiple ultimate realities.

And since, as just mentioned, God cannot be composed of parts, the various attributes above described, which perforce are multiple in human conception, must all be one and identical in the fullness of being that is the divine essence. In this vein, Augustine writes in *De Trinitate*:

But we indeed use many different words concerning God, in order to bring out that He is great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatever else He may be called that is not unworthy of Him. But His greatness is the same as His wisdom, for He is great not by bulk, but by power. Similarly, His goodness is the same as His wisdom and greatness; and His truth is the same as all these qualities. And in Him it is not one thing to be blessed, and another thing to be great, or to be wise, or to be true, or to be good, or in a word to be Himself. (6.7)

God, therefore, as the truly ultimate reality, is quite properly beyond the grasp of human comprehension, of whom it can only achieve an intimation, since he so utterly exceeds the totality of contingent, conditioned reality of which the human mind is part.

Not surprisingly, therefore, classical theists—among whom Maimonides is one of the most evident examples—have long supported apophatic descriptions of God, those which state what he is *not* and entail no plurality in him, in order to present as pure and befitting a notion as possible, for a limited mind, of what God is. From this perspective, one may know God as ultimate and transcendent most fittingly by recognizing him, as described above, as *not* contingent, dependent, composite, material, mutable, finite, or temporal. As Maimonides writes, these descriptions of what God is not, classed as “negative attributes” in philosophical terminology, “are those which are necessary to direct the mind to the truths which we must believe concerning God; for, on the one hand, they do not imply any plurality, and, on the other, they convey to man the highest possible knowledge of God” (*Guide*, 1.58), insofar as a total positive comprehension of his essence is impossible. It is in this light that the tradition of classical theism insists that God, furthermore, is not merely *a* being among the sum of beings in the world, for that would imply that he is some finite essence to which existence has been added, an entity circumscribed by contingent attributes, and not the absolute, and absolute being, itself. Stripping away from him any basically undivine property, one can only affirm of God the notion of being itself, as identical to that reality whose necessary, because unconditioned, existence is the constant source and ground of all contingent beings, as eloquently described, in recent years, by the Orthodox Christian intellectual and writer David Bentley Hart:

To speak of “God” properly, then—to use the word in a sense consonant with the teachings of orthodox Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Bahá’í, a great deal of antique paganism, and so forth—is to speak of the one infinite source of all that is: eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, uncreated, uncaused, perfectly transcendent of all things and for that very reason immanent to all things. God so understood is not something posed over against the universe, in addition to it, nor is he the universe itself. He is not a “being,” at least not in the way that a tree, a shoemaker, or a god is a being; he is not one more object in the inventory of things that are, or any sort of discrete object at all. Rather, all things that exist receive their being from him, who is the infinite wellspring of all that is . . . In one sense he is “beyond being,” if by “being” one means the totality of discrete, finite things. In another sense he is “being itself,” in that he is the inexhaustible source of all reality,

the absolute upon which the contingent is always utterly dependent, the unity and simplicity that underlies and sustains the diversity of finite and composite things. (2013, 30)

It seems to me, then, given Stapledon's philosophical training, that it is against such a traditional and well-articulated idea of God that the Star Maker should be analyzed.

Though Stapledon sometimes does ascribe the nature of "absolute spirit" to the Star Maker, and even applies such terms as infinity to it, this ascription itself is belied by the fact that this state is *achieved* by, and thus *contingent* upon, the evolutionary process according to which the Star Maker fashions the worlds of the multiverse and develops along with those creations. That its state as "absolute" and eternal spirit should at all proceed from a final union between itself and the supreme cosmos—at which point it is somehow to be considered the ground of all things, although its very existence embodies imperfection and deficiency, as it hungrily seeks a fulfillment it does not have of itself—is thus philosophically unsound. It is philosophically unsound, at least, to call such an entity "God," for it is such a thing whose being is not constant and perfect of itself, but such as must undergo, and indeed requires, a "revolutionary change," as happened when it transitioned from its "immature" to "mature" creating (Stapledon, 176).<sup>3</sup> The Star Maker, therefore, despite its cosmical sublimity and inhuman majesty, is properly a creature far more than it is a veritable creator. Much like the "demiurge" of Plato's *Timaeus*, who creates the visible universe while being in himself limited and subordinate to the truly divine realm of the Forms, the Star Maker is a god, but hardly God: a maker, but no true Creator. À la the *Timaeus*, it is thus a demiurge, but scarcely Deity.

## 2.2 God, the Good, and Theodicy

Even among demiurges, of course, and among imperfect gods, there are degrees of benevolence and malevolence. Plato's demiurge, for instance, endeavors to make the universe as good as possible, on the paradigm of the eternal Forms, so much as it can within the bounds of its own limitations and those of the primordial matter to which it

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<sup>3</sup> Certain readers will note here that however much the Star Maker is undivine and altogether inferior to God according to the philosophical premises of classical theism, its portrayal may be influenced by Hegel's account of "spirit" and "absolute spirit." Two readings of the meaning of these terms, "metaphysical and non-metaphysical," are at present operative in Hegel scholarship. As described by Smith, the former view may aver that the spirit is "a cosmic being which *truly* exists but there is no way to separate such a being from his embodiment in the world," since "this being *posits* the world for the sake of his embodiment in it" (237-238). The latter view, however, asserts that for Hegel this spirit "is simply an expression for the fundamental relation between self-conscious subjects who create a social space within which certain principles are taken to be authoritative" (238). The question of Stapledon's fidelity to Hegelian principles, and their influence on his fiction, however, lies beyond the scope of the comparative analysis here, focused as it is on classical theism to illustrate how the contingency of the Star Maker and—as the next section shows—how its cold amorality decisively distinguish it from the fullest conception of divinity advanced by preeminent theistic philosophers.

lends design and structure—even while the demiurge of Manichaeism, in dramatic contrast, is the unabashed author of evil. As we have seen, however, the Star Maker has much within it that can be properly called malevolence, given how Stapledon can readily ascribe to it “diabolical glee” (170). That is not to say, however, that the Star Maker is purely evil: there are many moments when Stapledon, despite his general insistence that it does not really love, shows us that the Star Maker sometimes does regard its creatures with a patronizing, though clinically contemplative, affection.

In it, there is thus both good and evil. About this point, indeed, Stapledon is explicit, for he describes how the Star Maker, in his early creations, once disassociated the good and evil aspects of itself in order to add to the interest of certain worlds, as the two principles fought for supremacy, as well as sovereignty over souls (173-175). At times, therefore, the Star Maker could in fact will the good of its creatures in an incidental way, as working to the ultimate end of its own self-actualization. Yet, on account of its basic deficiencies and imperfection as a sub-divine maker, it does actively will evil for the sake of an aesthetically rich outcome at the acme of its evolutionary process.

The Star Maker's positive will towards evil, however, is only possible or intelligible precisely because it simply is not God as understood in classical theism. This is because in the relevant philosophical traditions God has always been recognized as the ultimate good itself, and for fundamentally metaphysical reasons. To wit, classical theistic thinkers have long reasoned that the good is intrinsically related, exemplified by, or even identical to being, existence, and actuality. The good, since it is that which is desirable in itself, must therefore be ultimately indistinguishable from the life and vitality implicit in actual being, for such being is desirable and choice-worthy in itself. Consequently, insofar as God is at once perfect and fully actual being, and the constant source of the existence of all things, he must be in himself absolute goodness. Plotinus thus writes in the *Enneads* that the “One,” the ultimate and divine reality in his system, is the good, for the “Good is that on which all else depends, towards which all Existences aspire as to their source and their need, while Itself is without need, sufficient to Itself, aspiring to no other” (1.8.2). God is that good, that is, in whom all things have their origin and by whom they are sustained, even as all things strive toward him, as the highest teleological end, to the extent that they themselves desire actuality, life, perfection.

Thus arguing that existence is what is desirable and good in itself, Avicenna, employing the same principle set forth by Plotinus, concludes that God as transcendentally perfect existence must be identical to goodness. The logical corollary Avicenna immediately draws from this conclusion is that evil, as earlier stressed by the Neoplatonists and Augustine, cannot in itself be existence or possess it. Hence, evil is not anything as such, but is rather a privation or corruption of being and the good, deficiency as compared with a fully actual state of perfection (*The Metaphysics*, 284). God's will, therefore, in not being something set apart from his indivisible essence, cannot ordain anything other than his own pure being and what is befitting of that pure being: the gracious bestowal of existence onto all things, which in themselves cannot exist and thus, in themselves, cannot attain to any good. In bestowing existence onto all things, God accordingly bestows good on all things insofar as they have being, since existence and its perfection just *is* the good.

In this connection, we can return to the same place we had earlier visited when we considered Aquinas' definition of love. Though Aquinas freely admits that God does not "feel" love, since immaterial reality is not capable of having passions, Aquinas argues that God does love all things, on the basis of the metaphysical principles laid out. He writes:

Now, it has been shown above that God's will is the cause of all things. It must be, therefore, that a thing has being, or any kind of good, only insofar as it is willed by God. To every existing thing, then, God wills some good. Hence, since to love anything is nothing else than to will good to that thing, it is manifest that God loves everything that exists. (1.20.3)

Neither this kind of love, much less this God, is at all anthropomorphic. This recognition of love in the divinity, therefore, is a striking but metaphysically consistent aspect of the concept of God in classical theism. The remarkable consequence of the nature of God and of love so conceived is that it is metaphysically impossible for God to will evil—for evil is the privation of being—whereas God can will only being and its actualization, for this alone accords with his own inviolable nature as the perfection of existence itself and the supreme good. Hence, no more than fire can produce cold, no more than the Sun can emanate darkness, can God will or even be the creative cause of evil. Evil, after all, is not even so good as to exist in itself. Rather, it is an abstraction formed in the mind, a name that designates the privation, imperfection, or corruption incidentally impinging on contingently existent beings, or even that disorder of human will by which it directs itself to ends that are not consonant with true happiness.

Under classical theism, therefore, it follows that God's creative act must be wholly benevolent. Needing nothing for himself, in eternally being inimitable perfection and illimitable vitality and life, God could only create for the good of the creature, and only for the sake of the creature disinterestedly order it to himself as the perfect good. The Star Maker, in contrast, in having deficiency and imperfection as part of its very essence, and in desiring its own partial good, can viciously and corruptively will gratuitous evil on its creatures, and sometimes, on a whim, to take a perverse delight in their suffering. With little surprise, then, can one read Stapledon's description of how one of the Star Maker's more developed worlds could even be considered, in a sense, "his superior, and his teacher" (179). What would be a philosophical absurdity to ascribe to God can readily be attributed to an amoral demiurge such as the Star Maker.

Nonetheless, the idea that an amoral demiurge is the immediate cause of our own cosmos can have a certain appeal. Despite the general problems of logic in Stapledon's system, the idea—that evil exists in the world because its maker is evil enough not only to permit it but to desire its presence—is intelligible. Though I doubt that Stapledon himself believed in the literal truth of the mythology he created in *Star Maker*, it is possible that for him it had resounding metaphorical resonance. If there is no God as described in classical theism, then there is simply nothing truly beyond the deficient and contingent sphere of nature; since there is no ultimate, infinite, and immaterial ground to all finite beings, there cannot be any perfect and all-loving source of their existence. Consequently, in accord with a pious agnosticism, Stapledon might well worship "the spirit" that has happened to arise on Earth, all the while thinking that it is but a chance, and ultimately tragic, occurrence in a



universe formed and determined by purely amoral and impersonal forces, and necessarily unconcerned with the values and yearnings of conscious life—goodness and love.

Alternatively, distancing himself from any strong materialism, Stapledon could have implied, by the intimate connection between the Star Maker and the supreme cosmos, that consciousness is somehow intrinsic to the world and by itself tends to greater spheres of lucidity along an evolutionary path. But because such a naturally originated consciousness has no eternal and perfect source, it cannot have an everlasting destiny and beatitude through its relation to a veritably transcendent realm of being. Thus, it must eventually succumb to death and face the unfeeling oblivion of complete annihilation, its only consolation a tragic knowledge of the fleeting yet profoundly real beauties of moral excellence and value it had conceived in life. The tragic sublimity of such a reality, in which consciousness arises, develops, and triumphs but is ultimately destroyed, certainly looks *as if* it had been authored by the mischievously malicious, yet artistically sophisticated, Star Maker, who as the great tragedian contemplates with equal delight the evanescent joys and the final annihilation of his characters. In such a world, the only psychological refuge from the problem that evil poses lies in finding some satisfaction in the *aesthetic* rightness of such a cosmic tragedy, even as the evil of the Star Maker is mythologically justified by Stapledon's insistence that it is, above all else, an artist of the most sublime and terrible dimension.

In any case, since a demiurge is essentially finite and imperfect, however grand in comparison with what it has fashioned, it has no great need for a theodicy. The sufferings of the world can simply be chalked up to either its malice and indifference or its limitation and ineptitude. The case with the God of classical theism is quite different. This God cannot be justified by any appeal to his malice, for he is fully good, or his indifference, for he is all-loving will, much less to his ineptitude. Likewise, and unlike for the Star Maker, the presence of evil in the world cannot be attributed to his aesthetic liking for tragedy over pure comedy, for in having no needs whatsoever, and in being eternal perfection, he could not create a world to serve his own satisfaction. Whence evil then? Because Stapledon was so exquisitely pained by the problem of evil, there is little wonder that in *Star Maker* he consequently rejected, in the radical fashion of SF epic, the perfect, metaphysically ultimate, and wholly good God of classical theism. In exchange, he presents us with the aesthetically motivated, though morally deficient, demiurge that is the Star Maker, whose creative stamp is as equally represented by the delights as the horrors of this life, as each ecstasy and agony contributes to its contemplative pleasure.

Nonetheless, though Stapledon naturally does not consider them in *Star Maker*, there are ways classical theists have logically reconciled God's benevolence with the presence of evil, ways that make use of the same metaphysical principles by which they affirmed his goodness. Since evil is essentially a privation of being, any created and thus contingent being is incidentally subject to it, insofar as that contingent being is not identical to the absolute and immutable perfection of the Godhead. Since any contingent being, and any contingently existent world, necessarily involve mutability, limitation, imperfection, and deficiency, this in itself does not entail that God positively wills the presence of evil. Indeed, since natural evil and suffering arise from those features inseparable from a

contingent and created realm of being, it is not self-evident that a possible world, which is necessarily deficient and dependent on a higher reality, could logically be so perfect as to be exempt from any privation of being. Evil can thus be intelligible, even in a world created by a wholly benevolent Divinity. In this case, however, since evil is not any actual entity but is precisely privation and nonentity itself, it is not “something” that has proceeded from God. As Plotinus made clear, evil, itself nothing other than absolute lack and deficiency, belongs to the mode of non-being, and results in that which, pertaining to the mutable and privative sphere of matter, is distinct from the absolute perfection of the ultimate reality (*Enneads*, 1.8.3-4). Accordingly, for him, the further creatures emanate from the absolute and perfect source that is the One, the more material, conditioned, and imperfect they inevitably become, and evil incidentally enters thus into the order of things.

Avicenna, affirming these Neoplatonic points, also asserts that everything in its essence, insofar as it has being, is good. Yet the incidental and contingent confluence of certain causes and entities can result in privations inherent in particular beings, such as when fire, though good in itself, injures flesh when it should happen to touch it (339). In this scheme, since evil is properly a nonentity and occurs only when there is an incidental confluence of contingently contrary entities, it is never actually willed as a positive intention by God. Nonetheless, as Aquinas—who desired, not only to assert the fundamental goodness of the divine reality à la Plotinus, but also to defend its providential nature—quotes Augustine: “Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil” (1.2.3). Thus, although the evil that results from the contingent confluence of causes is not willed, insofar as it is evil, by God, it is permitted insofar as these same causes work within the ultimate harmony of a universe ordered to a supreme good.

My point, however, is not to elaborate, or even briefly summarize, a representative number of the many theodicies to be found in classical theism. Rather, such theodicies show that any resolution of the problem of evil, within a context in which God is recognized as metaphysically ultimate and wholly good, must involve the *moral* vindication of God, the insistence that he never, and cannot, will any evil. That the presence of evil, as privation of being, is allowed to persist in the world is thus to be understood not as caused by the express intent of God’s will, but rather as an incidental feature of contingent beings and the confluence of certain causes and effects. Yet even this evil, the classical theist would insist, would not be permitted by God unless he could bring good out of it.

In contrast, because the Star Maker is not God—metaphysically ultimate and wholly good—there is no logical need for Stapledon to provide a *moral* vindication of its allowance of evil. And since the Star Maker is not wholly good, it is possible and intelligible for it actually to *will* evil in a way that the God of classical theism could never coherently do. As such, some manner of *aesthetic*, and not moral, justification of the Star Maker is the only kind possible or necessary. In sum, to the extent that the Star Maker is a deficient demiurge, it is free to be evil, and the evil of the world can be explained, as it is in *Star Maker*, as the direct effect of its malicious, though artistically refined, will.

## Conclusion

In the foregoing pages, we considered Stapledon's presentation of the Star Maker as his own exploratory and fictive response to the problems of existence and of evil, analyzed the Star Maker's nature, and compared it against the concept of God articulated in classical theism. Finding that the Star Maker could not be considered truly divine from classical philosophical perspectives, we concluded that its basically *amoral* nature, and its positive will for the presence of evil, is explicable only insofar as it is not metaphysically ultimate and identical to the good itself, as distinct from the God of classical theism. That Stapledon seemingly justifies the Star Maker in reference to a purely *aesthetic* ideal may thus signal that *Star Maker* has a metaphorical valence, as expressing a basically non-theistic philosophy in which the highest values of conscious life, such as goodness and love, are fated to a tragic, yet tragically beautiful, end of ultimate annihilation. This possible perspective of Stapledon's, despite the moral justifications of God provided in classical theism, in turn may have proceeded from Stapledon's inability to reconcile, to his own satisfaction, the notion of benevolent Deity with the presence of evil in the world. Thus, while stalwartly upholding the moral substance of the "spirit," Stapledon expresses his fear that goodness and love have no ultimate metaphysical foundation, in being truly present neither in the Star Maker of his own myth, nor in the purely natural world of his experience.



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