

**S.E. ALSFORD****Evil in the Non-Human World**

*The article briefly surveys some of the traditional responses to the problem of evil, focusing on the implications for natural evil of Irenaean and Augustinian approaches. It goes on to suggest that a deeper consideration of the interdependence of all creation can illuminate the problem and that there are important theological reasons for questioning the common distinction between 'natural evil' and 'moral evil', and for using the language of creation-fall-redemption as a way of exploring the connections between them.*

**Key Words:** Creation, Moral evil, Natural evil, Fall, Salvation, Suffering, Irenaean theodicy, Augustinian theodicy.

**Introduction*****The seriousness of the problem***

We are all aware of the common, every-day response to what is designated 'natural evil'. Faced with disasters and suffering which seem to bear little relation either to human action and responsibility or to human desert, we blame and question God—can we really rely on God's goodness, God's power or even God's existence?

Each of these responses has philosophical precedents, and although we begin here within a framework concerned to defend both God's existence and God's goodness and power, it is important to recognise the depth of the challenge which evil and suffering present to such belief. It is important for 2 particular reasons:

i. Firstly, we must take seriously Flew's challenge that rather than facing such problems by explaining the existence of suffering in the light of God's love, Christians are prone to modifying their beliefs—for example, by saying that God's love is not like human love—to such an extent that God finally dies 'the death of a thousand qualifications'.<sup>1</sup>

ii. Secondly, we must be aware of the danger that the attempt to explain or understand evil may end up becoming a justification or a legitimisation of evil. If evil is part of God's plan, then in what sense is it evil?<sup>2</sup>

1 Flew, A., MacIntyre A. (eds) *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, London: SCM (1955), pp. 96–108.

2 Cf. Kenneth Surin who argues against the task of theoretical theodicy, Surin, K. 'Theodicy?', *Harvard Theol. Rev.* (1983) 76, 225–247, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, Oxford: Blackwells (1986). Also Bauckham, R. 'Only the suffering God can help', *Themelios* (1984) 9/3, 6–12, 'Theodicy from Karamazov to Moltmann', *Modern Theology* (1987) 4.1, 83–97; Roth, J.K. 'A theodicy of protest'. In Davis S. (ed.) *Encountering Evil*, Atlanta: John Knox Press (1981), pp. 7–38; Sontag, F. 'Anthropodicy and the return of God'. In Davis, S. (ed.) *Encountering Evil*, Atlanta: John Knox Press (1981), 137–166.

### ***The nature of the problem***

However, having noted these important provisos, we do begin here from a position of faith in God as all-good, all-powerful Creator and we are seeking to understand evil in the light of such belief, and specifically in the light of the doctrine of the fall. What are the connections between evil in the non-human world and the fall? Asking this question inevitably focuses on the relationship between 'natural evil' and human freedom and responsibility. As Paul Ricoeur argues, from a comparison of Genesis with three types of 'beginning-mythology', the Adamic 'myth' is the 'anthropological myth par excellence' setting up, as it does, a radical origin for evil which is distinct from the primordial origin of goodness and linking that origin definitely (if not unambiguously) to human freedom.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth noting at this point that evil is not only a logical problem—the problem of the logical consistency of theistic belief—and an existential problem, but it is also a theological problem. The existence of sin and evil are essential to Christian theology because salvation, which is the overcoming of sin and evil, is absolutely central. We thus begin with the affirmation not only of God's existence and goodness, but also of the existence of evil as evil—as something which needs to be overcome.

### ***Definitions***

Before we go further, let us attempt one or two quick definitions. In a sense of course this whole paper is concerned with the definition of evil, but maybe we can give an initial, baseline definition of evil as that which is opposed to God and to God's nature and intentions, that which God does not wish, that which leads away from God. We might well want to add: that which causes destruction, decay and suffering. The Oxford English Dictionary refers to evil as 'harmful'—but part of the debate about evil is the question of whether or not so-called 'evils' are actually *beneficial* in the long run.

The distinction between moral evil and natural evil is a routine procedure in philosophical discussions of the problem, most commonly referring to moral evil as that which is linked with the specific, conscious agency of responsible beings and to natural evil as that which occurs without any such moral agency, which would clearly include evil in the non-human world. However it seems to me that a paper on non-human evil in the context of a conference on the fall must ask the question: to what extent should we accept this distinction?

This question might take us in one of (at least) two directions, and these form the major sections of this paper. Firstly, we might re-evaluate our definition of non-human, 'natural' evil as evil. Secondly, we might reconsider the relationship between the human and non-human.

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3 Ricoeur, P. *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston: Beacon Press (1967), pp.232ff.

## Re-evaluating our definition of evil

### *The goodness of God's creation*

Conviction of the goodness of God's creation—indeed of all that exists—has led thinkers such as Augustine, Schleiermacher and Barth to deny that any of God's creation can be or become evil. All that exists is necessarily good—including, says Augustine, thorns, thistles and the flames of hell—evil is a defection from the good. Augustine speaks of our ears being insufficiently attuned to the harmony of creation, which is only ever harmful or evil as a result of human sin; Schleiermacher speaks of limited perspective which leads us to interpret as evil things which we cannot see from God's perspective; Barth talks of the weakness and corruptibility of nature as its 'shadowside', not evil but merely the finitude of God's good creation.<sup>4</sup>

A theistic evolutionary perspective, such as that of Teilhard de Chardin or process thought, might be placed in the same category here seeing chaos, destruction and pain in the created order as an inevitable part of the evolutionary process, its necessary waste product—growing pains, not really something appropriately described as 'evil'.<sup>5</sup>

### *The anthropological reference of evil*

It certainly seems that some 'natural evils'—such as earthquakes—are not evil *per se*, we consider them to be evil only because of their effect on us. We no longer think of change in itself as implying imperfection, as did the Greeks and centuries of theologians influenced by them, and so why should we consider certain processes and upheavals in the natural order to be evil? Watching a star going nova, billions of miles away, we would see the process as a matter of scientific interest, awe, aesthetic enjoyment. There would surely be no question of evil unless we knew that there was life—especially intelligent life—in that particular system. Does evil necessarily have this anthropological reference?

However this does not get us very far in terms of the problems of evil. Any natural event which regularly or normally causes human suffering still demands a response—a tidal wave may not in itself be evil but if it causes thousands of deaths and widespread homelessness it will still raise the question why did God allow it to happen, or to have such an effect? and was it part of God's plan of creation that such things should happen?

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4 Augustine, *Confessions* vii. 10ff.

Schleiermacher, F. *The Christian Faith*, Edinburgh: T&T. Clark (1928), 81.3.

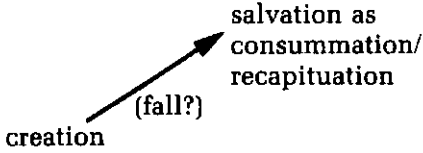
Barth, K. *Church Dogmatics* III/3, Edinburgh: T&T. Clark (1960).

On privative views of evil. cf. Kane, G.S. 'Evil and privation', *Int. J. Relig.* (1980) 11, 43–58 and Blocher, H. 'Christian thought and the problem of evil', part I, *Churchman* (1985) 1.

5 Teilhard de Chardin *The Phenomenon of Man*, London: Collins (1955).

Griffin, D.F. *God, Power, and Evil: A Process of Theodicy*, Pa: Westminster (1976), 'Creation out of chaos and the problem of evil'. In Davis, S.T. (ed.) *Encountering Evil*, Atlanta: John Knox Press (1978).

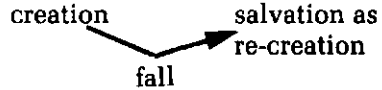
**Natural Evil as a necessary or beneficial part of God's creation**



This question has led many scholars to a form of 'Irenean theodicy'—Irenean because, like Irenaeus, they see the whole of history as one continuum, a process beginning with creation and working its way

'upward' towards its future and fulfilment, according to God's plan.

The other major classical option is an Augustinian theodicy, which sees the fall as the source of all evil and as a break in the continuum and a determination of the whole process. We will consider this



second approach in the second part of this paper.

**Irenean 'soul-making' theodicy**

Clearly an Irenean approach might incorporate an evolutionary perspective such as those mentioned above, re-evaluating 'natural evil' as not, in fact, evil. However it also goes on to explore the reason why God might choose such a means of creation, and why he might ordain or permit the suffering which it entails. John Hick and Richard Swinburne are two of the major contemporary proponents of this view, suggesting that 'natural evil' is a necessary part of the process of 'soul-making' which is part of God's creation plan.<sup>6</sup> A world with such hazards and challenges as we face—a 'half-finished universe', as Swinburne puts it—is necessary for two reasons:

**The Value of Suffering**

Firstly, it is necessary in order for us to have the possibility of taking free and responsible decisions, of co-operating and caring for one another. The occurrence of earthquakes, the existence of harmful viruses provides us with the opportunity of working together for one another's good.

Secondly, suffering is an intrinsic part of this process because it not only gives us the motivation to take these co-operative and caring decisions but it also teaches us the difference between right and wrong. How could we make this distinction between right and wrong actions if no pain resulted, if water didn't drown, fire didn't burn, knives didn't cut? We might be free, but we would not be responsible.

An Irenean approach may well have no clear doctrine of the fall at all,

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<sup>6</sup> Hick, J. *Evil and the God of Love*, London: Macmillan (1977). 'An Irenean theodicy'. In Davis, S. (ed.) *Encountering Evil*, Atlanta: John Knox Press (1981), pp. 39–68. Swinburne, R. 'The problem of evil' in Brown, S.C. (ed.) *Reason and Religion*, New York: Cornell University Press (1977), pp. 81–102.

beginning with the incompleteness or immaturity of creation as God's original intention. When God saw that creation was good, this was not to say that it was perfect and finished in every way, but was good for God's purposes.

... something like our present imperfect world, with its contingencies and uncertainties, is an environment more apt for person making than would be a stress-free paradise. ... the suggestion is not that God ordains the specific challenges and the specific good and bad fortunes which each individual meets, but that he has ordained a world involving genuine contingencies as an environment in which the human animal may begin to become a 'child of God'.<sup>7</sup>

Such an approach then really denies the description of 'natural evils' as 'evil': they are part of God's creative purposes, not the result of a fall of any kind (except maybe insofar as our perception of them as evil is a result of sin, as Schleiermacher suggested). What is necessary is not that creation should be changed or put right but that we should meet its challenges with increasing maturity.

This kind of approach includes some very plausible arguments, and certainly we would not want to deny that 'evil' can often lead ultimately to good. It also seems important to recognise the relative and limited nature of many of our value judgments. Evaluations of particular things or events as good or evil will vary in different historical and cultural situations, and there might well be events which at the time seemed bad but which, with hindsight, we would describe as good and even as necessary. There are of course layers of meaning in the word 'good' such that we could describe a situation as painful or unpleasant but good.

Is this, however, a solution to the problem?

To be a solution to the logical problem of evil the equation by which 'natural evils' lead to good must work out. Critics object that the equation does not always—or even most often—work out in our personal experience and that given the sheer quantity of suffering, particularly the suffering of the innocent and the death of children, it is impossible that the equation will ever work out in overall terms. The cost frequently and ultimately outweighs the gains. There is also a question here about whether 'the innocent' includes the animal world. It would seem not a little arrogant and self-centred to view the suffering of animals as a means to the end of human maturity and growth.

As an existential response this is also difficult. It may undoubtedly be uplifting when those who are suffering can themselves see some good outcome—however it is hard to see this as an adequate response from anyone who is not involved in the suffering. There is always the danger of

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<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.* Swinburne, pp. 125f. Swinburne combines this type of argument with a free will type defence with reference to moral evil.

legitimizing suffering, and of denying peoples' real apprehension of meaninglessness. Can one really maintain, in a situation of intense suffering—such as the 'natural' death of a child—that this is part of the order of God's creation as it was originally intended?<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, does the gradual, upward climb of the Irenean schema sit true to the pattern we see in Genesis and throughout Scripture? Ricoeur's analysis of the symbolism of evil leads him to insist on the hiatus between creation and fall as one of the distinctive features of Genesis. God created, and it was good, and then something happened.

Modern theology has been broadly characterised by a move away from the traditional structure of creation-fall-redemption within which theologians such as Augustine worked.<sup>9</sup> In some ways this is a necessary redressing of the balance, Western and especially Protestant theology having sometimes taken the emphasis of Augustine and the reformers on sin and guilt to extremes without doing equal justice to their stress on salvation and the goodness of creation. However we must take seriously Ricoeur's warning that without the hiatus of the fall evil can come to be seen as deriving from an evil deity, or as a tragic fate or as something which is either not ultimately real or not ultimately wrong. If this is the case, then it is so for 'natural' as well as 'moral' evil.

Assuming that we want to maintain God's non-involvement with the origins of evil then we must either say that 'natural evil' is not ultimately or really evil—nothing 'happened' in terms of nature, the problem lies in our perception of or our ways of dealing with the challenges—or we must maintain this hiatus, which has traditionally been expressed in terms of the fall.

Scripture consistently links the state of the created order together with human activity and responsibility. The history of sin and salvation is the history of the created order as a whole, not only the history of humanity. This will be the theme of the second part of this paper.

### **Natural evil and the fall**

The Augustinian-type of free will defence shares with the Irenean an emphasis on human freedom and responsibility, but sees the imperfections and evils of creation as a *result of*, not a *prerequisite of*, such freedom and responsibility.

This approach tends to be concerned primarily with moral evil, natural evils being traditionally seen as part of God's punishment for the first sin. But can we not say more about the connections between moral and natural evil? I believe that we can say more than this and that we *have to be able to*

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<sup>8</sup> Hick recognises the existential inadequacy of his explanation. 'An Irenean theodicy'. In Davis, S. (ed.) *Encountering Evil*, Atlanta: John Knox Press (1981), p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Kelsey, D.H. 'Human being', Williams, R.R. 'Sin and evil'. Both in Hodgson, P. King, R. (eds.) *Christian Theology*, London: SPCK (1983), pp. 168–195.

say more—in response to the depth of suffering caused by ‘natural’ disasters—than asserting that this is God’s punishment for sin. The problems of this response are most clear in instances of the suffering of children. Not only do we need a coherent answer to the criticism of such as Flew, but we also need to be able to respond in a sensitive and existentially satisfying way to those who are actually suffering. More is also required, surely, if we accept some account of evolution in which the chaotic and seemingly destructive processes commonly labelled ‘natural evil’ pre-date the arrival and responsible activity of humanity.

### ***Ecological considerations and the image of God***

Recent concern over ecological issues has helped to highlight Scripture’s emphasis on the inter-relatedness of humanity and the rest of creation and this emphasis is, I think, an essential element for understanding the effects of the fall. Both fall and salvation have cosmic implications, a conclusion which is increasingly unavoidable as we re-discover the interdependence of all creation.

Recent theological discussion of the image of God has focused very much on *relationality* as the key to human likeness to the Creator. It is not so much the possession of particular faculties or abilities which distinguishes us from the rest of creation, but it is the fact that it is an essential element of our humanity to be *in relationship*. Just as our triune Creator is eternally in relationship, within the being of God, so we too are seriously and unavoidably related to God, to our fellow-human beings and also to our environment. These relationships may be broken or disrupted by sin, but they are still determinative for our being.<sup>10</sup>

It is in the light of these insights that we need to read, in Genesis 3, of the curse on the earth following human sin, and in Romans 8:20 of the earth being subjected to futility. Maybe we should read this statement as an affirmation of the inevitable effect of sin, given the constitution of God’s creation, rather than as an indication of some new decision or state of affairs brought about by God’s will in response to the human decision—that is, it could be *descriptive*, rather than being purely or only *prescriptive*. Just as a family will inevitably be affected by the actions of one member, because of the ‘organic’ nature of their inter-relatedness, so too creation is inevitably affected by our actions.

This is not meant to imply that such a process or effect would be

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10 On recent emphasis on interrelatedness, cf. Cairns, D. *The Image of God in Man*, London: SCM (1953). Zizioulas, J.D. *Being as Communion*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd (1985). Alford, M.E. ‘Coadunacy and the problem of self/other relationality in theology with special reference to Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Barth and Pannenberg’. Unpublished PhD thesis. Durham University (1990).

On its application to the environment, cf. Brueggemann, W. *The Land*, London: SPCK (1977), Hall, D.J. *Imaging God, Dominion as Stewardship*, Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans (1986).

detached from or exclude the will or action of God because we may, I believe, understand God's involvement in immanent as well as transcendent terms, as a working in, with and through 'natural' processes.

In many instances we can of course easily see these connections. Many 'natural' disasters are greatly exacerbated by human negligence, greed, lack of concern, and as our technological power increases it seems increasingly difficult to separate 'natural' events from human agency. However maybe there are deeper connections than those that we can easily trace in terms of visible cause and effect.

Need we necessarily conclude that Genesis 4 is speaking symbolically when it speaks of Abel's blood crying to God from the ground, and when God speaks of Cain's alienation from the land as well as from his family and tribe? Does this not also throw light on other instances where the land suffers on account of human sin? If there is no such integral relationship between us and creation, and no such tainting of creation by our sin then why didn't God cause a virus to wipe out only humanity (except for Noah and his family) and leave non-human creation unharmed, instead of dealing with creation as a whole in the flood? Isaiah 24 talks clearly of the effects of human wickedness on the earth which mourns and withers, lying polluted because of human sin and Jeremiah 4:23-28 and Zephaniah 1:2,3 describe a complete reversal of the creation of Genesis 1 as the chaos of human society is inevitably reflected by chaos within creation.<sup>11</sup>

So where does this thinking lead us? We can explore some possible schemas which might be implied by this.

This thinking might fit in very well with the Augustinian schema of a pre-fall cosmic paradise, the event of the fall, and the result: fallen humanity and fallen creation. In the light of what we've said above however, maybe we could suggest that the fall resulted not so much in a degeneration of the created order itself, but rather a breakdown of our relationship with creation.

The issue is maybe not so much that earthquakes and floods occur (if they are not evil *per se*) but that they are harmful to us—possibly because we don't or can't deal with them or respond to them properly. Genesis 3 doesn't necessarily imply a change in the constitution of the earth itself, but damage to the relationship between human beings and the earth.

This leads us then to a schema of a pre-fall creation, with earthquakes etc. occurring as a natural part of God's good creation, the event of the fall, and the result a break in the harmony of God's creation.

We can easily trace the breakdown in our relationship with our environment in terms of the ecological crisis and our abuse of God's

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11 Dyrness, W. 'Stewardship of the earth in the Old Testament', in Cranberg-Michaelson, W. (ed.), *Tending the Garden*, Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans (1987), pp.59ff.  
Houston, J. *I Believe in the Creator*, Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans (1980), p. 191.



creation<sup>12</sup> and it is surely in the light of the fall, and not according to the Creator's intention, that we tend to view creation as something to be conquered and overcome, not as something to be tended—even be-friended.<sup>13</sup>

However if our relationship to our environment is, in some way, ontological, intrinsic rather than extrinsic, then our tendency to see this relationship in terms of subject-object, manipulator-instrument, could itself be a symptom of our fallenness (as could even our separation of 'natural' from 'moral' evil) and the effects of the fall may extend not only to our misuse of creation but also to the fact that creation is dangerous to us. Can we envisage a situation where earthquakes etc. occurred, but never so as to cause harm to human beings?

John Wenham gives a couple of examples of this type of argument: R.E.D. Clark, who argues that the diseases caused by viruses, bacteria etc. may result from the transfer of such micro-organisms from their usual habitat to an alien habitat where they become harmful; and A. Jones who cites evidence for this view in terms of parasitism and the specific reasons why parasites become pathogenic.<sup>14</sup>

This schema allows for an evolutionary account of creation whereby the evolutionary processes—including earthquakes etc.—occurred before existence of humanity, before any kind of fall.

In some ways this echoes Augustine's language about natural evil as a break-down in the harmony of God's good creation. However the lack of harmony may not be limited to our inability to perceive and properly relate to creation—it may be that the relationship is objectively changed or broken. Just as our mental, psychological, emotional, spiritual state affects our bodies in ways that we cannot fully trace or explain, so too, using the microcosm as a model for understanding the macrocosm, it may be that human activities and decisions, relationships between humanity and God affect our physical environment.

As we recognise the reality of psychosomatic illnesses, for example, as the physical outworkings of non-physical realities, recognising the link without fully understanding it, so too the natural processes of the world might be linked to the fall. Some such view of the lack of harmony in creation—a lack of harmony seen not in the existence of viruses per se, but in the fact that they are destructive to human beings—seems to make sense theologically and ecologically. It does not explain the mechanics of how exactly the breakdown occurred, but it defines such breakdown in interdependence as evil, as opposed to God's nature, plan and wishes and as resulting in the suffering and destructiveness which leads us to describe

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12 Cf. Moltmann, J. *God in Creation*, London: SCM (1987).

McDonagh, S. *To Care for the Earth*, London: Geoffrey Chapman (1986).

13 Hall, D.J. *Imaging God. Dominion as Stewardship*. Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans (1986), p.161ff.

14 Wenham, J. *The Enigma of Evil*, Leicester: IVP (1985).

natural occurrences as evil. It also maintains an anthropological account of evil—the hiatus of which Ricoeur writes.

However, one question which is not addressed by this schema is the question of animal (or *all* non-human) death and suffering. If we take an evolutionary account, then clearly plant and animal death occurred before the fall, and we may take the link between sin and death to refer only to human death (some take it to refer to spiritual rather than physical death). What I have said so far clearly suggests at least an increase in the suffering of creation through human sin, but we might want to view non-human death and suffering *per se* as part of the problem of evil. Although this is an issue which I have felt unable to address within the constraints of this paper we must at least consider the implications of the view that the pain of animals is also part of the bondage of/or deviation from the originally good creation of God. If decay, death and pain in creation before humanity's existence and fall *do* require some such explanation, which hasn't been established here<sup>15</sup> then maybe it can still be linked with the free decision/s of created, responsible moral agency in the form of super-human forces.

Plantinga<sup>16</sup> and others bring in the agency of fallen angels as a possible explanation of natural evil, as part of a free will defence. Such an argument could be employed in various ways:

a. in terms of the *direct* action of a non-human, fallen agency upon creation, it leads to a schema where natural evil (including animal suffering) results from the direct, deliberate intervention of the personal force/s of evil.

b. in the terms I have been suggesting above, it is possible to see a break in the harmony of non-human creation, a change in its constitution, as an inevitable result of the fall (in the way indicated above) not of human beings, but of such beings prior to the fall of humanity.

These schemas both see the suffering of animals as evil, not part of God's original creation and as therefore requiring some explanation. This would mean, of course, that the garden of Eden does not represent the perfection of the whole creation into which Adam and Eve were born—it would, instead, be a garden set apart from the rest of creation, an exception—representing maybe God's original intention, or future possibilities—where Adam and Eve are safe. Once having decided against God, however, and having been thrown out of the garden Adam and Eve face a creation already fallen and dangerous.

One interesting point about such an interpretation is that it gives us once again the paradox we find in Genesis which Ricoeur calls 'the paradox of the enslaved will'.<sup>17</sup> This is the paradox of the anthropological origins of

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15 Wenham, J. *The Enigma of Evil*, Leicester: IVP (1985), p. 198ff feels that animal suffering does not require an explanation, cf. MacDonald, H.D. *The God who Responds*, London: James Clark (1986) p. 139f who thinks that it does.

16 Plantinga A. *God, Freedom, and Evil* New York: Harper & Row (1974).

17 Ricoeur, P. *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston: Beacon Press (1967), p. 151ff.

evil, which we see in Adam and Eve's choice, alongside the suggestion—in the form of the serpent—that evil is *already* there in some way. We find this paradox also in the doctrine of original sin, the paradox of responsibility and determination, and these schemas would echo this pattern again with the paradox of human involvement in and responsibility for the state of creation, but also the flaw already there. However, such speculations seem to take us further than ever away from an adequate existential response to natural evil. Furthermore, we have to consider carefully whether this is really an adequate interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis, with their anthropological emphasis, and whether such a view can be seen as consonant with Scripture's constant linking together of human and non-human creation in terms of sin and judgment.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up: I have outlined various possible, exploratory schemas for explaining natural evil in terms of the fall, the differences between them providing some stimulation, I hope, for further thought. Whichever of these seems the more helpful, it seems clear to me that a greater understanding of the interdependence and mutuality of the whole of creation is an important key. Sin and evil essentially are the breakdown of community with God, with each other and with our environment.

As modern theology seeks to rediscover the organic view of reality which we see in the Old Testament, moving away from dualistic and individualistic thinking which have been so dominant and unhelpful in the past, it discovers elements and strands in Scripture and throughout Christian tradition which see creation as a whole. Human beings and the rest of creation may not be identified as homogeneous, but neither are they seen as separate realities, whether we are talking about creation, fall or redemption.

### ***Evil and Redemption***

One of the great truths forced home (by exaggeration) by Karl Barth is that we learn what sin and evil are by looking at our salvation, by looking at the one who has overcome them. There is an important and inevitable theological symmetry between understandings of sin and understandings of salvation.<sup>18</sup> If we change the scope of what is meant by/included in sin and evil then we also change the scope of salvation. If 'natural evil' is not really evil at all, then the natural world does not in itself need saving, though it may need saving from the sinfulness and destructiveness of human beings. Conversely, if salvation includes the whole of creation, then surely it must be true of the whole of creation that salvation is necessary. Romans 8:18ff. talks of the need of creation as a whole for salvation and liberation, and links the present state and the future of creation with that of human beings.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211ff, Alsford, S.E. 'Sin as a problem of twentieth century systematic theology'. Unpublished PhD thesis, Durham University 1987.

By way of conclusion, then, maybe we can reflect on Christ in whom we see the fulfilment and re-creation of the image of God intended for humanity from the beginning.

In Christ we see fulfilment of the interdependence of all creation, in his perfect relationships with the Father and the Spirit, with humanity and with his environment. Christ is the model and inauguration of the new creation and it is *as such*, as the paradigm of what humanity should be, not only as God, that Christ has power within creation—power to heal, to raise from the dead, to quiet the storm—power to deal with or put right those things usually identified as ‘natural evil’. This power arises not from manipulation; it is not necessarily just an exercise of divine power, but arises from a relationship with the Father, and a relationship with creation whereby the wild animals in the wilderness and the storm are not a threat—as maybe they would not have been a danger to us without the hiatus, the event of the fall. Colossians talks of Christ as the firstborn of all creation, the one in whom all things hold together and through whom God reconciles everything to himself—things in heaven and earth (1:15–20). This, I would suggest, is a function not only of Christ’s divinity, but also of his perfect humanity.

Resurrection is at the heart of this new model for human being, and it is a redemption of creation’s bondage to decay, futility and death because Christ’s death, far from being futile, leads to the life of the whole new creation. Whereas for us death so often leads to despair, fear, meaninglessness—with Christ we have the supreme fulfilment of the pattern which is set in nature of birth-death-rebirth.

Just as the earth was implicated in the judgment of Israel so the salvation pictured in Scripture is clearly a salvation and liberation of the whole of creation, a salvation which consummately fulfils the covenant which, after the flood, God made with Noah and his family and descendents and with every living creature on the earth.<sup>19</sup> Not only will God never again destroy the whole earth but God, through Christ, will create a new heavens and new earth where God will dwell with his people.

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19 Houston, J. *I Believe in the Creator*, Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans (1980), chapter 9.

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