

## FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT? REFLECTIONS ON WANDERING IN DARKNESS

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Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness* is a magnificent achievement. It combines the acuity and rigor of analytic philosophy with a deeply and richly imaginative approach to the interpretation of literary (and especially biblical) texts, and to our understanding of human nature. There is much here with which I agree and such criticisms as I offer mainly take the form of friendly amendments. Given the length and complexity of the book I have had to ignore many issues altogether, and also to omit many subtleties in her discussion of those issues with which I do engage. In particular, I much regret not having space to discuss her illuminating remarks about the role of stories in what she dubs 'Franciscan' knowledge, and her penetrating and stimulating application of these ideas to biblical exegesis. I begin with some questions about the general nature of her project.

### DEFENCE AND THEODICY

How are we to reconcile the goodness of God with the reality of suffering? Stump draws a distinction, initially introduced by Plantinga, between a defence and a theodicy. On her account, a 'defense describes a possible world that contains God and suffering and that is similar to the actual world, at least in the sense that it contains human beings, natural laws, and evils much like those in our world; and then the defense proposes a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing evil in such a possible world' (p. 19).<sup>1</sup> A defence does not claim that the possible world just described *is* the actual world, whereas a theodicy does. Stump

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<sup>1</sup> All otherwise unidentified page references are to Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

claims that what she is offering in this book is ‘strictly speaking’ a defence rather than a theodicy (p. 19). Her strategy is to take Aquinas’s theodicy – his understanding of how the world is, including God’s role in allowing suffering – and offer it merely as a defence. On this understanding of the two terms, ‘nothing in a defense rules out someone’s accepting the defense as a theodicy.’ (Indeed, I suspect she thinks Aquinas’s view does describe the actual world.)

The terms ‘defence’ and ‘theodicy’ are used in rather different ways by different writers in response to rather different challenges. Her explanation of how she is using the terms left me rather unclear as to her overall strategy. I think that is because she sometimes appeals to criteria appropriate to one kind of defence when the context suggests she has a different kind of defence in mind. I begin by mapping various possibilities, and then suggest what seems to me the most plausible interpretation of Stump’s enterprise.

What is a defence, and what would constitute a successful one? The answer depends on the nature of the attack. Plantinga popularized the notion of a defence, when he offered the free-will defence in response to the *logical* problem of evil put forward by, among others, John Mackie. To refute Mackie’s claim that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God, the theist does not have to produce a theodicy; i.e. tell us what God’s actual reason is for permitting evil. All the defender has to do is to describe some possible world in which there is reason for a good God to permit evil. It does not even matter, for these purposes, whether it is *likely* or *plausible* that this possible world is the actual one; the defender can engage in whatever metaphysically extravagant speculations he wishes. And Plantinga does so engage, one might think, in his postulation of trans-world depravity.<sup>2</sup> Maybe each creaturely essence would go wrong on some occasion in every possible world in which it exists, but that postulate looks remarkably *ad hoc*. This, of course, is not a defect in a defence against the logical problem of evil, since any coherent story, however unlikely, will suffice to show that no contradiction is involved in the co-existence of a good God and evil.

What has come to be known as the evidential problem of evil is both more challenging and more interesting. The evidentialist claims that the specific nature of evil in our world makes theism unlikely. There is only

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<sup>2</sup> And, perhaps, in his postulation of very powerful evil spirits.

morally sufficient reason for any agent to bring about or allow an evil if two things are true. First, that the evil was the only means available to bring about some greater good (i.e. it was a necessary evil); second, that the evil is such that an agent would be justified in allowing it to bring about that good (call this an acceptable evil). The evidentialist may concede that the theist can explain why God would allow some bad things, but denies that there is a plausible theistic explanation of *all* the evil there is – perhaps because there is too much evil, or evils that no-one can explain, or evils so dreadful that no good being would bring them into existence. The existence of *apparently* gratuitous evils – ones that are unnecessary or unacceptable (or both) – nevertheless constitutes good evidence that God does not exist.

Van Inwagen has suggested that the strategy of defence can be extended against the evidential argument.<sup>3</sup> He, like Plantinga, distinguishes between theodicy and defence, but his account of the distinction differs from Plantinga's. Van Inwagen's take on the evidential argument is along the following lines.<sup>4</sup> Let 'S' stand for a fairly detailed description of suffering in our world. Now consider two hypotheses. The first is that neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings is the result of non-human actions. Call this naturalism. The other hypothesis is theism. The evidential argument claims that S is not at all epistemically surprising, given naturalism, but it is very surprising given theism. So we have good prima facie reason to prefer naturalism to theism. How to meet this challenge? The theist might argue that S is much less surprising (because more probable), given theism, than one might suppose. This is the strategy that Van Inwagen labels theodicy, and here his usage differs from that of Plantinga and Stump. Van Inwagen thinks the prospects for theodicy are bleak and so proposes to *adapt* Plantinga's notion of a defence in order to defend theism. Suppose one were in no 'position to assign any epistemic probability to S on theism ... then ... one is not in a position to say that the epistemic probability of S on [naturalism] is higher than the probability of S on theism.'<sup>5</sup> Given that degree of ignorance, S would not be surprising on theism – not because S was just what one would expect, but because one had no idea what to expect if

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<sup>3</sup> Peter van Inwagen, 'The Problem of Evil, The Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence', *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 5, *Philosophy of Religion* (1991), pp. 135-165.

<sup>4</sup> I have shortened and altered it in ways that I hope do not distort it.

<sup>5</sup> Peter van Inwagen, 'The Problem of Evil, The Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence', pp. 140-141.

theism were true. There are thus two ways, on his view, in which some occurrence can be epistemically unsurprising. It can be what one would expect, given the evidence, or it can be not unexpected, only because one has no idea what to expect.

A defence against the evidentialist, for van Inwagen, is ‘a story according to which God and suffering of the sort contained in the actual world both exist, and which is such that (given the existence of God) there is no reason to think that it is false, a story that is not surprising on the hypothesis that God exists.’<sup>6</sup> There is, remember, no reason to think it false, because we have no way of assessing its likelihood. What use is a defence of this kind? Van Inwagen offers a quasi-judicial analogy: suppose Jane wishes to defend the character of Richard III; how will she deal with evidence that suggest he murdered the princes in the tower? She may offer a story that accounts for all the evidence, on which Richard did not do the dastardly deed. To succeed, she does not have to show that this is what (probably) happened. Her line of defence will be successful if her auditors think ‘For all I know, that’s true. I shouldn’t be at all surprised if that is how things happened.’<sup>7</sup>

In her opening chapter, Stump draws on both Plantinga and van Inwagen in setting out her position. Yet, I suspect, she is not engaged in the same enterprise as either of them. I don’t think she is merely addressing the logical problem, for at least two reasons. First, she points out, rightly, that ‘such a claim is much harder to support than its proponents originally supposed’ (p. 3). Second, the logical problem claims that, if God exists, there cannot be *any* suffering, a claim I doubt any opponent of theism would now make. Stump’s concern is with the amount and depth of the suffering we find in our world. That suggests she is addressing the evidential problem.

I also doubt, however, that her strategy is the same as van Inwagen’s, although she appeals to his account of Jane’s defence of Richard III in setting up her own case. His defence depends on claiming that we can assign no epistemic probability (high, low, or middling) to S, given theism. To make out that case, he appeals to the depth of our ignorance at a number of points, including large dollops of moral and modal ignorance. But Stump rejects ‘skeptical theism’ which rests on such assertions as that we ‘cannot evaluate the intricacies of probabilistic reasoning or

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

cannot calculate complicated modal claims' (p. 14).<sup>8</sup> I think, therefore, that Stump is addressing the evidential problem of evil, but is offering something more substantial than the sort of defence van Inwagen has in mind. She is not simply claiming that we have no idea whether to expect suffering, given theism. Rather, she offers an account in which, given certain plausible claims about God's nature and purposes, we should expect God to allow the kind of suffering (of adult human beings) that we find in our world.

While, as I understand her, Stump wants her account to be plausible, she does not claim that it is true (since that would involve showing, among other things, that there is a God). How might describing a merely possible world meet the evidentialist challenge? Here is an analogy. Consider a biologist who thinks that evolution by natural selection is a well-supported theory. In response to the objection that some biological trait or characteristic appears to be inexplicable on his theory, he may offer one or more explanations of how the attribute in question could have evolved. Even though he lacks evidence to show that the trait did evolve in one of the ways he suggests, his defence will be acceptable if his explanations of how it might have done so are plausible. And they will be plausible if, given what we now reasonably believe, one of these explanations might very well be true. The biologist's speculations are stronger than a defence in van Inwagen's sense. He is not merely claiming that the adaptation is not unexpected since, in the depths of our ignorance, we have no idea what to expect. Rather, he is trying to show that such an adaptation is just what we would expect, given the truth of evolution, while acknowledging that he is not in a position to assert that his story of how the adaptation arose is in fact the correct one. I suggest this model as the best way of interpreting Stump's enterprise.

Unsurprisingly, I do not have a complete account of what makes a theory plausible, but I take it that it should not resort to ad hoc or unsupported assumptions or postulations, and it should cohere well with a large part of those of our beliefs that are well-supported. In the body of her book, Stump makes strenuous efforts to meet this standard. For example, in chapter 15, she goes to considerable lengths to support the claim that 'suffering enables [the sufferer] to grow in psychic integration'. She offers detailed evidence, not only from our own experience and that of others, but also from scientific investigations of the topic (pp. 458-460).

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<sup>8</sup> She cites van Inwagen's article, among others, in a footnote at this point.

Her practice, then, strongly supports the view that what she is offering is a theodicy, rather than just a defence, in van Inwagen's sense.<sup>9</sup> (To avoid confusion, I shall, however, continue to follow her usage and talk of her 'defence'. It is the nature of her strategy that we need to clarify; the nomenclature is fairly unimportant.)

I labour this point because, although in building her case Stump tries to make her explanation of God's allowing suffering as plausible as possible, when she explicitly states her criteria for an adequate defence, she puts the epistemic bar far too low. Of the worldview she has just been laying out in great detail she writes: 'Because it is a defence and not a theodicy, it needs only to be internally consistent and not incompatible with uncontested empirical evidence' (p. 452). This standard *would* be acceptable if she were addressing only the logical problem. But as a response to the evidential problem it is woefully inadequate.<sup>10</sup> It is so minimal that any competent conspiracy theorist, biblical literalist, philosopher, or paranoid schizophrenic, asked to defend his crazy views, might well spin a yarn that will pass it.<sup>11</sup> I conclude that she understates both what she needs to do, and what she actually accomplishes; her own account of what she is doing may lead the unwary reader into thinking that her project is less ambitious (and hence less interesting) than it actually is.<sup>12</sup> How well, then, does it succeed?

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<sup>9</sup> On van Inwagen's account, the theodicy argues as follows (where *h* is whatever auxiliary hypothesis the theist uses to explain suffering): 'The truth of [*h*] is just what one would expect given theism, and *S* is just what one would expect (would not be all that surprising) given theism. And, therefore, we do not have a *prima facie* reason to prefer [naturalism] to theism, and the evidential argument from evil fails.' *ibid.*, p. 139. Other writers offer similar accounts of the distinction. For example: 'A theodicy is intended to be a plausible or reasonable explanation as to why God permits evil. A defense, by contrast, is only intended as a possible explanation as to why God permits evil.' (Nick Trakakis, 'The Evidential Problem of Evil' in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/evil-evi/#H3>> [accessed 3/9/2012]). Since writing this paper, I have found that Michael Tooley makes similar distinctions in his piece on the topic in the Stanford Encyclopedia (<<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/>> [accessed 3/17/2012]).

<sup>10</sup> How inadequate will depend, of course, on how we interpret 'uncontested'. I leave that aside here.

<sup>11</sup> I am reminded of a remark once made by a philosopher about some of his less stable colleagues: 'Crazy logicians are impeccable reasoners when it comes to what follows from what. The problem arises when they begin with a faulty premiss – such as "Aliens are attempting to control me via my TV"'.

<sup>12</sup> My fellow-symposiast at the Pacific APA, John Martin Fischer, raises similar worries about the precise nature of Stump's enterprise in his comments on Stump's book.

## MORAL ADEQUACY

Clearly, any defence of God's allowing suffering will have to be *morally* plausible. In this respect, Stump's defence does very well indeed. Most, perhaps all, defences justify suffering by appeal to a greater good and Stump's is no exception. However, most popular theodicies or defences try to justify the suffering of *some* people by appeal to a greater benefit given to *others*. But whether that is a sufficient moral justification is hotly contested; aren't (some of) those who suffer being *used* (in a morally objectionable way) for the benefit of others, or to increase the overall good? (Call this the using objection.) It is one of the great merits of Stump's defence that it avoids this difficulty by insisting that, for suffering to be justified, it must be a necessary means to a greater benefit for *the person whose suffering it is*.<sup>13</sup> Or, more accurately (since whether we receive the benefit is up to us, as well as to God) the suffering must make available to the sufferer a good that, were she fully to understand what she was being given, she would be willing to trade her suffering to receive (e.g. p. 375).

Of course, it is open to those whose defence is subject to the using objection to argue that God is not doing anything morally objectionable on their account. Even supposing they could make a reasonable case, I think Stump's account would retain two advantages. First, unlike a using account, it avoids appeal to controversial moral claims, and that increases its plausibility. Second, even if one thinks it would be acceptable for God to use some for the benefit of others, one can surely agree that it would be morally preferable if God could achieve these great goods without using anyone. It comports much better with the Christian conviction that God cares for each creature as well as for the good of the whole.

Stump draws on Aquinas's work to show how God might achieve this goal.<sup>14</sup> For Aquinas, love requires two interconnected desires: the desire for the good of the beloved, and the desire for union with the beloved (p. 91). Someone who lacks psychic integration cannot be close to others, and so be fully united to them in love (p. 125). According to Aquinas, 'an agent can be internally integrated only around the morally good.' (p. 138) But our condition is such (as a result of the Fall) that we cannot

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<sup>13</sup> Stump does not explicitly consider the merits of her explanation compared with others, but she does, on occasion, draw a sharp contrast between her view and that of others (e.g. p. 408).

<sup>14</sup> To say that, in this brief survey, I am leaving much out would be an understatement. But space does not permit.

on our own achieve this integration and so be in a position to be united with God in love, which is by far the greatest good for humans (p. 387). Suffering will be justified if it is needed to ward off the worst thing, which would be to lose the opportunity to be united with God. For Aquinas, suffering can be medicine for the soul, purging sin and bringing us to humility (p. 398). Finally, union with God comes in degrees, and the further suffering of someone who has turned to God can make that person closer to God, and also make him more glorious – an inspiration to others (p. 401).<sup>15</sup> To this, Stump adds a further proviso. One who suffers often loses what is most precious in her eyes. A good God would not only ensure that that her suffering led to a great good for her, but would want to restore to her what she most desired (the ‘desires of her heart’), though not, perhaps, in their original form. ‘They can be lost in one way and gained in another way, much more deeply desired by that particular person.’ (p. 449)

Perhaps the clearest and simplest example that she cites of having the desires of one’s heart met in an unanticipated way is the case of Victor Klemperer, whose ambition to write his magnum opus on Eighteenth Century French literature was thwarted when the Nazis came to power. However, he wrote a diary of his experiences in prison which was published after his death, and which is now hailed as an important masterpiece. So he did achieve his literary ambitions after all.

Of the many concerns one might raise about her account, I mention only two.

#### TROUBLE DOWN THE ROAD?

Stump says, quite rightly, that in assessing the adequacy of the Christian response to the problem of suffering, we have to take as given, for the purposes of discussion, the Christian world-view. Moreover, a defence ‘does not seek to establish the existence of God or to argue for the truth of a particular set of religious beliefs’ (p. 415). True, but Christians do wish (and need) to defend the rationality of their beliefs as a whole, and a defence that dealt adequately with the problem of suffering would form an important plank in an evidential case for the existence of God. The worry I have is that, the more we require God to do in order for Him to be justified in allowing suffering, the less probable it may be that the

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<sup>15</sup> The detailed account of how suffering can plausibly be supposed to achieve these ends is too complex even to summarize here.



amount and kind of suffering we find in the world is compatible with the goodness of God. Let me explain. Suppose Stump is correct. That is, that 'God is justified in allowing human beings to endure suffering ... because, through their suffering, and only by its means, God gives to each of the protagonists something that these sufferers are willing to trade their suffering to receive, once they understand the nature of what they are being given', where that must include restoring the lost desires of their hearts in some form that makes what they get back more valuable than what they lost (p. 375). Stump rightly draws our attention to the 'stunning nature of this claim' (p. 375). It certainly demands more of God's providential grace than do some of the other solutions to the problem of suffering. To achieve this goal, God is going to have his work cut out. Omnipotent though he is, he can only bring about the logically possible, and we may wonder whether, for some cases of suffering, it really *makes sense* to suppose that the desires of each person's heart can be restored, even in a post-mortem existence, especially when one considers how specific such desires can be.

Stump's way of meeting this difficulty, as we have seen, is to allow some flexibility in what counts as getting the desires of one's heart. Each sufferer may not receive back what he specifically desired in the first place. Klemperer does not get to write his great book; he gets to write a different great book. Ironically, one of the themes of his diary is that he has been prevented from writing his magnum opus. But Klemperer may not be the best judge of such matters; Stump claims that 'there is no transparency as regards flourishing, or one's heart's desires' (p. 13). So Klemperer may, after all, have achieved his heart's desire and could have been (or can be, in a post-mortem existence) brought to see this. (And it might be part of God's mercy to enable him to see this.)

Perhaps this response of Stump's works best where what is desired are states of affairs. I may want to live in the hills of the North, but what I may really want, unknown to me, is to be close to the Maker of those hills.<sup>16</sup> I find it harder to see how it would work if the desire of one's heart involved love for a particular person. Suppose you have one child, whom you love deeply. The child goes to the bad and rejects not only your love, but God's also. Assuming the child never repents, the rift in your relationship will be permanent. In that case, the longed-for union

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<sup>16</sup> This kind of experience is a major theme in C. S. Lewis's autobiography *Surprised by Joy* (London: Collins, 1965).

with your child is forever beyond your reach. Not even God can restore it. God can remove your child's freedom and force him to love you but what he cannot do, of course, is to make the child freely return your love. And only the child's freely reciprocating your love can satisfy this particular desire of the heart. Stump has suggested to me (in correspondence) that in such a case you would cease to desire union and your love would alter its nature so that it became merely a desire for your child's welfare. I don't think this answers the worry for two reasons. First, though I might sensibly give up hoping that my child will have a change of heart, my deepest desire has not been satisfied. Union with my child was and remains what I most want, though I recognize its unattainability. Second, if my child has irrevocably rejected both good and God, then my desire for his welfare is also frustrated.

I think there is a general point here. In any world in which agents have freedom and people have a deep love for others there is the possibility that there will be irrevocable disappointment of people's deepest desires. Freedom entails that people can reject the love on offer, and that must lead to the frustration of the desires of those who love them. If we can make sense of God having desires of the heart, and I think we can, then plausibly one of these will be a desire that all his creatures should freely respond to his love.<sup>17</sup> Since some may nevertheless reject him, then even God will suffer uncompensated loss.

I hope it is by now clear how raising the bar for what God would have to bring about to justify his allowing suffering may also make it harder to believe that there really is a good God. Consider agnostic Maria who finds the problem of suffering the chief stumbling block to Christian belief. If it were not for that problem, she would think it more probable than not that God exists to a degree that would make her adopt theism. As it is, she thinks that, because of the problem of suffering, the evidence is too equally balanced to warrant a move to either theism or atheism. She is familiar with some solutions to this problem, in which God uses the suffering of some to bring about the greater good. She has no problem in seeing *how* God could achieve such good ends; what she doubts is whether the proffered explanation is sufficient to *vindicate* his goodness, since it seems to involve using others. Suppose she now reads *Wandering in Darkness*, and for the first time finds a solution that

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<sup>17</sup> 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!' (Luke 13:34; see also Matt. 23:37).

is morally satisfying. If there is a good God, he should care for each of his creatures individually in the way Stump describes. If things were as Stump says they might be, then God would be justified in allowing the amount and kind of suffering we find in the world. But now a new doubt assails her. *How* can even God bring it about that *no* person *ever* permanently loses what is of deep importance to her? She acknowledges, of course, that God may do this in many cases, as Stump so movingly shows in her case studies. But, as we have seen, it does not seem to make sense in every kind of case.<sup>18</sup> So Maria has reason to doubt that God could have so organized the world that no one ever permanently loses their heart's desire. And that lowers her (reasonable) estimate of the probability that God exists, and so she remains agnostic.<sup>19</sup>

#### AN EPISTEMIC CIRCLE?

So far I have acknowledged that someone in Maria's position might have good grounds for accepting Stump's solution as a morally satisfying one. Each sufferer will, as a result of their suffering, achieve a good for which, if they were reasonable, they would willingly accept that suffering. The central good (leaving to one side the issue of satisfying the desires of each heart) that suffering can bring, on Aquinas's and Stump's picture, is closer union with God. But now I wish to raise an epistemic problem about whether an agnostic, like Maria, can have good grounds for believing that such union would be a great good, and so sufficient to justify the suffering. Let us accept that union with the creator and ruler of the universe, *if he were perfectly good*, would be such a good. But union with the creator and ruler of the universe would not be so good if he were morally flawed; if he were jealous, vengeful, capricious, callous, or just indifferent to suffering. I should stress that there is no metaphysical problem here: the universe could be as Aquinas describes it. But I think Maria, and other agnostics like her, are faced with an epistemic circle, since the problem of evil raises precisely the issue of whether the ruler of the universe, if he exists, is wholly good. She would have grounds for believing that the ruler of the

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<sup>18</sup> Stump rightly says that no defence or theodicy can tell us what specifically justifies each particular case of suffering, since we do not know enough of that person's story; we can only give a generic account. But if Stump is right, there must be some such story for each person (as indeed she insists).

<sup>19</sup> Put in van Inwagen's terms: Stump may have raised the probability of S, given God, but lowered the probability of God, given S. I am grateful to Piers Rawling for pressing this objection on me.

universe is wholly good if she had grounds for believing that the ruler gives each sufferer a benefit that outweighs the suffering. Since, however, the good the sufferer is said to obtain is union with that ruler, she cannot have grounds for believing the benefit is sufficiently good unless she has grounds for believing he is good. And she cannot have grounds for believing he is wholly good unless she has grounds for believing that the benefit is sufficiently great to justify the suffering.<sup>20</sup>

One possible response to this worry is to claim that defences are meant to address only theists. The sole purpose of a defence is to show that theists are within their epistemic rights in believing in God. Defences are not meant to give any grounds for belief to non-believers. But that would seem an unduly narrow view of one's audience. Since solving the problem of evil removes one barrier to showing that the theist's belief in God is rationally defensible, one might also hope that it would enable belief in those whose way to belief is currently blocked by that barrier. But, if I am right, it seems that it cannot do so without circularity.

Is there any solution – any way in for the agnostic that avoids the circle? An epistemic solution would supply independent grounds for believing that God is good.<sup>21</sup> Here is a suggestion as to how that might work; it draws to some extent on a hugely important part of Stump's book that I have not yet discussed. This is the possibility of what she calls Franciscan knowledge; knowledge which is not reducible to knowledge *that*, i.e. propositional knowledge. Examples might include knowing colours, music, faces, etc. Such knowledge, though not reducible to propositional knowledge, can form the basis for propositional knowledge. An important aspect of Franciscan knowledge is knowledge of persons, knowledge we can only gain by personal interaction. One important aspect of such knowledge, I am going to suggest, is that one can have good grounds for believing something about a person, believing *that* he is kind or sincere on the basis of meeting him in person, even if that acquaintance is short, so that one cannot point to any evidence other

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<sup>20</sup> I have used the phrase 'ruler of the universe' to avoid the objection that God, by his very nature, is essentially good, in which case the proposition, 'God is good', is necessarily true.

<sup>21</sup> There is an alternative pragmatic solution, of the sort advocated by William James, namely that it might not only be legitimate but prudent for the agnostic to begin to practice what the religion preaches in order to discover if there is truth in it. As Hugh McCann strikingly put it in discussion: 'if there might be gold in these hills, it would be sensible to start digging.'

than the overall impression he made. One's knowledge *of* the person, which cannot be fully communicated to those who have not met him, would be the basis for this piece of propositional knowledge.

A famous parable by Basil Mitchell illustrates this.<sup>22</sup> Suppose you are fighting with the partisans against the occupying forces. One night you meet a man who tells you he is a partisan leader, but who warns you that, in order to remain undetected, his behaviour will have to be ambiguous. Though you have met him only once, you find him utterly trustworthy. His behaviour is indeed ambiguous; sometimes he is seen helping partisans, but sometimes he appears to cooperate with the occupiers. Other people, who have not met him, are sceptical. How can we know if he is really on our side? You, however, having met him, continue to trust, in virtue of that personal experience, and you are justified in so doing.

Stump considers four biblical narratives in which she illustrates how suffering can be redeemed. In three of them – Job, Abraham, and Mary of Bethany – a central issue is trust. One main point of the suffering of each of these people is to test and strengthen their trust in God, so as to enable closer union with him. It is essential to such tests, of course, that God's behaviour is perplexing; if those tested knew what was going on, it would not be the same sort of test. Take Job. Job's beef with God concerns God's justice; how can a good God let him suffer in this way? When he meets God, God *tells* Job that he has a caring relationship with all his creation, but cites no evidence for these claims. Nevertheless, Job is convinced. Why? One answer would be that when he meets God face to face he knows that God is caring and trustworthy though, as Stump remarks, '[h]ow Job knows ... that his suffering is at the hands of a good and loving God ... is hard to explain to someone who was not part of the same second-person experience.' (p. 224)

How might this get the agnostic out of the epistemic circle? If the agnostic could have a personal experience of God, then she might find him to be wholly good. Since this encounter gives her good reason to trust that God is good, then she can justifiably see union with him as a supreme good for her. In the words of the Psalmist, 'O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' (Psalm 34:8)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Basil Mitchell, 'Theology and Falsification' in A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (eds), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 104-8.

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