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SUFFERING FOR REDEMPTION: A REPLY TO SMITH

Eleonore Stump

In his comments on my paper "The Problem of Evil" Michael Smith raises some objections to my understanding of omnipotence and free will, a worry about my interpretation of the after-life and the Fall, and a moral concern about the character of God as presented in my paper. In the short space allotted me for a reply, I will briefly touch on his objections in the order given, which I take to be in order of increasing importance.

In my paper I argued that a person's freely willing that God fix his will enables God to alter that person's will without violating its freedom. Smith objects that I have confused freedom of a process with freedom of the product and that the freedom of a will is "determined by the nature of that will and not how this nature has come about." Now while I agree with Smith that there is a difference between a process and a product, and between the freedom of one and that of the other, I do not see that I have confused the two or that Smith has presented them appropriately in the examples he gives to support his objection. Consider these examples of Smith's: (1) a person who is free freely sells herself into slavery, and (2) a person who is a slave is freed against her will. These, I take it, are supposed to be examples in which (respectively) a free process results in an unfree product and an unfree process results in a free product, but it seems to me that the force of these examples is generated by an ambiguous use of 'free' and by a confusion about what freedom is being attributed to.

The second case concerns a person whose acts are not free, in the sense that they are legally and practically coerced by someone else; but nothing in this state of affairs shows that the slave's will is not free, even just in the minimal sense of not being causally determined by someone else. On the contrary, the point of the example is that the slave wills to remain a slave; and unless some longer story is told, the slave's willing to remain a slave is an act of free will. This act of will does not bring about the state of affairs willed because the slave in virtue of being a slave is coerced into acting in accordance with her master's will. But it is her status which is coerced and not her will; otherwise, the act of freeing her could not be against her will. So in this example of Smith's we do not have a case in which an unfree process results in a free product, if what we mean by this description of the case is that an act of free will produces a state



of will which is not free, which are the process and product at issue in my paper. On the other hand, if what we mean is that by a process which involves coercing someone's actions that person can be brought into a state in which her actions are more under her own control than they were previously, the example is no longer relevant to my argument, which concerned only an act of free will and the state of will it produces.

Something similar can be said about Smith's first example. The free woman who sells herself into slavery is a person who freely wills (for whatever reason) to enter a state of slavery. Having entered that state, she will find her actions legally and practically coerced; but her will is not any less free. It is still open to her, for example, to will not to be a slave. If she does so will, she may find herself in danger, or she may even lose her life; but she can unquestionably still so will. So this is a case in which an act of will that is not causally determined by someone else results in a state in which the actions of the one willing are legally and practically coerced by someone else; but it is not a case in which an act of free will results in a state of will which is not free, where by 'free' in both cases we mean at least 'not causally determined by someone else.' Hence, this example is not relevant to my argument either.

As for Smith's general claim that only the nature of the state of will and not the process resulting in that state determines whether the will is free, I think the examples given in my paper show that this claim is not true. If Augustine had continued to will incontinence and if God had then caused him to have a continent state of will, Augustine's continent state of will would not have been free. It would have been a state of will brought about solely by God and in opposition to what Augustine himself willed. On the other hand, if Augustine wills that God produce in him a continent state of will, then that state is brought about partly by Augustine and in accordance with what he wills. Therefore, in the only sort of case at issue in my paper the freedom of the "process" is crucially relevant to the freedom of the "product."

In addition, Smith disputes my claim that God cannot make a person freely will anything by pointing out that God can bring about free actions in many ways, since he can "reason and persuade, exhort and ridicule, beg and bribe." But Smith has just misunderstood my claim. I was concerned to rule out only the possibility that God in his omnipotence might directly compel an act of free will. It is no part of my solution to deny that God can influence persons to certain acts of free will or that he can contribute to bringing about acts of free will by offering persuasion, reward, and punishment. On the contrary, my solution depends on claiming that God uses evil in a complicated process designed to result in a certain act of free will (namely, freely willing that God fix one's will) and that God thus contributes to bringing about (but does not causally determine) an act of free will.

As for Smith's worry that my solution places undue emphasis on an after-life, reminiscent of the views of the hasty martyrs of the early Church, I agree that my solution emphasizes the importance of an after-life, but I deny that the emphasis is undue. In my paper I am concerned to give a coherent and consistent picture of Christian beliefs, and on Christian beliefs heaven is an unending state of unsurpassable bliss. Given this understanding of heaven, it is reasonable that Christianity should emphasize the importance of the after-life in comparison to this life. Only an infinitesimal portion of a person's life is lived in this world, and the best states of that tiny portion are incomparably less good than any state of life in heaven.

Part of Smith's worry about my emphasis on the after-life is a result, I think, of his misunderstanding my position on hell. He takes me to be promoting a very mild doctrine of hell, which, he says, is not well-suited to the rest of what I claim about the importance of the after-life. My interpretation of hell, however, is mild only in the sense that it does not include retributive punishment. The morality of retributive punishment is by itself controversial, and perpetual retributive punishment poses even thornier problems. So for the sake of brevity I presented an interpretation of hell which does not include God's retributive punishment but which is nonetheless compatible with the notion of such punishment; and I left it an open question whether God's imposing retributive punishment in hell is justifiable and so properly included in the doctrine of hell. Nothing in this restriction on the interpretation of hell warrants the conclusion Smith seems to draw, that on my view the pains of hell are mild. On my interpretation, the pains of hell are spiritual or psychological; but it is perfectly possible for psychological pain to be at least as dreadful as physical pain. Think of the pain of the unmitigated loneliness which sometimes accompanies old age or of the pain of being permanently rejected by the person one loves passionately; or, most aptly, think of the pain of mental illness, which is often described by its sufferers in lucid moments as worse than any physical pain. It is true that on my solution to the problem of evil, life as a human being is preferable to annihilation or loss of human nature. What this ranking shows, however, is not that on my exposition of Christian doctrine the pains of hell are mild, but rather that on Christian doctrine the value of a human life is very great.

Smith also raises a worry over my interpretation of the Fall, claiming that it implausibly takes the Fall to be a single datable event and that it espouses a Lamarckian view of genetics. But a careful reading of my interpretation, spelled out as (8'a), (8'b), and (8'c), will show that it does not entail anything regarding the dating of the events which resulted in the Fall except that they are in the past. The claim that the Fall was brought about by a single datable event is compatible with (8'); but so is the claim that the Fall was the product of many human actions taking place over a very long period of time. As for the charge

of Lamarckianism, although Lamarckianism includes the belief that acquired traits are inheritable, not just any view that a self-produced alteration in a creature is inheritable is Lamarckianism. The claim that it is possible for a human being to alter his nature, even in a single datable event, in such a way that the alteration is transmissible to offspring is neither controversial nor Lamarckian. Consider, for example, a man who is exposed to radiation of such a sort that he contracts cancer and his germ cells are altered in a way which makes it virtually certain that his posterity will develop cancer. One need not be a Lamarckian to suppose that cases of such a sort occur. And similarly I see nothing Lamarckian about supposing that the changes in human nature brought about in the process resulting in the Fall were in some way accompanied by inheritable changes in the human genome.

Finally, and I think most importantly, Smith raises a moral concern over my solution. There is a limit, he says, to what decent people will accept as a means to an end; and the claim that all the evils in the world are instrumental goods is morally reprehensible. If God is using evil as a means to good, Smith maintains, he is in the same moral position as a man who tortures a child to save the world: we would not love such a person but be repelled by him. There are two things wrong with this objection.

In the first place, what strikes us as repellent about the torturer, I think, is that he is willing to accept the involuntary pain of a child as a means to a good which benefits the child only incidentally or indirectly. His intention in hurting the child is to purchase a good for the species, and he finds the child's suffering acceptable as the purchase price of that good. But my account emphasizes the importance of tying the benefit won by the suffering to the person suffering. What I argue is that there *is* something morally repulsive about supposing that the point of allowing a child to suffer is some abstract benefit for the race as a whole and, therefore, that the good which justifies a child's pain must be a benefit *for that child*. And it is clear that we do not find reprehensible a person who inflicts pain on a child when the point of doing so is solely and primarily to provide a benefit for the child which outweighs the pain. We approve of and commiserate with, we do not censure, a parent who puts a child with muscular dystrophy to dreadful pain to prevent her death, even though we know that the child's life will thereby be prolonged only a few years at best. We regard those few years of life as a great good, worth the pain of surgery and therapy. On my solution God is analogous not to Smith's torturer but to a long-suffering parent with sick children.

But there is another, much more important disanalogy between God and the man who tortures a child to save the world. The torturer is the sole cause of the child's suffering. The evils from which the torturer is saving the world are the reason for the torturer's hurting the child; but these evils by themselves without

the torturer would not have produced the child's pain. Without God, however, the inmates of Auschwitz would have suffered just the same (assuming for the moment that it is possible to conceive of the world's existing without God's existing). God did not initiate the evils of Auschwitz or cause the pain of the inmates; the Nazis did. But it is arguable that God uses the evils caused by others for the sake of bringing about a good which is the best available in the circumstances and which outweighs the suffering. In my discussion of the story of Cain and Abel, I argued that if God had intervened to prevent Abel's death, both Cain and Abel would have been worse off and that God therefore refrains from intervening. That God does not intervene does not mean God directly wills Abel's death, as the torturer wills the child's suffering. On the contrary, God's will, considered unconditionally, must be that Cain not murder his brother; otherwise God's anger and punishment after the murder make no sense. But, as I argued in my paper, since Cain does not will what he ought to will, God does not prevent Abel's suffering because this state of affairs is the best obtainable even by God in the circumstances. As regards moral evil, then, God is not in the position of the torturer, deciding to cause pain for the sake of some good, so much as he is analogous to a victim of moral blackmail, deciding not to prevent pain caused by others because the best state he can bring about in the dilemma in which he has been put includes that pain—only on my solution God is unlike victims of moral blackmail in that (among other things) he can use the suffering of the victims as a possible contributing means to a greater good for the victims themselves.

Secondly, as for the more general claim that there is a limit to what decent people will accept as a means, that there is no good which could justify Auschwitz, this is a complaint which, if acceptable, is effective not just against my solution but also against any attempt to reconcile the existence of evil with the existence of God by claiming that there is a morally sufficient reason for God to allow evil. This complaint, then, is in effect a challenge to give up one's faith in an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God in the face of the horrors of Auschwitz. I feel the force of this view. Nazi atrocities against the Jews were so great an evil that there is something disgusting and reprehensible about unemotional discussions of the goods which might constitute a morally sufficient reason for God to have allowed it. And since we are all members of the species which perpetrated that evil, since we are in some sense siblings of the evildoers, perhaps the only seemly response is one like Job's (cf. Job 40:4-5 and 42:2-3): silence in the face of something beyond our capacities to understand, in recognition of our unworthiness to judge.

But such a response is a far cry from claiming that there *could not be* a morally sufficient reason for God to allow the evils of the Nazis, that there could not be a good towards which God's allowing Auschwitz is any sort of contributing

means. Certainly some of the suffering current medical practice inflicts on certain patients in hospitals is immense, and yet the good which outweighs this medically-induced suffering is just the procuring of a few more years of life, often with diminished capacities and chronic pain. But if we are willing to believe that the limited good of prolonging a diminished life a little justifies the enormous suffering of the patient, I see no reason for thinking that there could not also be a good so great as to outweigh the far worse sufferings of the concentration camps. It is arguable that the precise nature of such a good is beyond our present capacities to understand. Since the evil of the death camps involves grossly evil actions on the part of several different nations and the sufferings of millions of people over a period of years, any outweighing good is likely to be as complicated as it is great; and it is not unreasonable to suppose that so complicated and great a good exceeds the limits of our present abilities to comprehend. But reason can show us, I think, that whatever the exact character of such a good, it must be of the general sort my solution suggests. It clearly cannot be a bodily good enjoyed in this life, because as far as we know no people have experienced a bodily good of such a magnitude. Therefore, if such a good exists, it must ultimately be a spiritual good experienced in an afterlife. I have no suggestion for what the direct or immediate good justifying God's allowing Auschwitz might be. I do not know how to construct for Auschwitz the sort of analysis I constructed for the story of Cain and Abel, showing that of the options Cain left God, God's failure to rescue Abel was the best available; and for the reasons sketched in the preceding paragraph I do not even want to try. But as I argued at length in my paper, on Christian doctrine the ultimate good which justifies God's permitting evil and which is open to everyone is salvation from sin and union with God, and the suffering is for redemption.