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A philosophical reflection on the conversation

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I would like to begin by paying tribute to the structure and spirit of the exchange that has unfolded in these pages. The interaction between the five symposiasts, if I may use that expression, which sees each author reviewing and elaborating on their initial contribution in light of the responses provided by their fellow contributors, provides an instructively multi-lensed perspective on the question of non-human suffering and struggle, and brings out the points at which each author sees their position as open to development, in light of the dialectical pressure exerted by other perspectives, as well as the points at which its commitments are taken to be more or less fixed. So in this way, the structure of the volume allows us to see something of the dynamic properties of each approach, that is, its susceptibility or openness to change in various respects – rather than thinking of each as simply a static body of ideas. As someone who, prior to reading this exchange and participating in the associated workshops, did not know the literature on animal suffering at all well, I have found accompanying our authors, each of them an experienced and expert guide, across this varied intellectual landscape revelatory: it is particularly helpful to have the terrain surveyed from different vantage points, so that its features

can be seen in the round, and various decision points, concerning, for instance, how to think of 'resistance', can be understood with respect both to the opportunities that are presented by a particular dialectical stance, as developed by one author, and to the intellectual opportunities that are thereby foregone, as disclosed in the contributions of another, who follows a different track.

I'll turn now to the intellectual substance of these exchanges, but I did want to begin by offering this appreciation both of the structure of the volume, insofar as it makes possible a dynamic and rounded appreciation of the issues, and of the contributions of the symposiasts, each of whom has taken up with verve and imagination the opportunities afforded by this multi-authored approach, above all through their close, charitable and responsive reading of the others' positions.

As all the authors agree, the question of how to understand suffering and struggle in the animal world is one that taxes our cognitive resources. In approaching this question, we are drawn very quickly into judgements about various dependency relations, for instance, whether one state of affairs is metaphysically necessary for another, that is, necessary in such a way that even God may not be able to secure the second without the first, and also judgements about the overall value of such compound states of affairs, where one state of affairs that seems evidently to be overall of positive value is taken to depend on the realization of a second state of affairs involving various 'disvalues'. The authors are all sensitive to the fact that modal and axiological judgements of these kinds (that is, judgements concerned respectively with possibility and necessity, and with value), where we are concerned with broadly defined states of the world, are hard to make with any degree of confidence, certainly if we are reliant simply upon the argumentative resources of philosophy.

The debate on the 'only way' approach in the volume provides one striking illustration of the wider question of whether and how we might understand the modal facts relevant to these issues. (The debate about the nature of creaturely freedom provides another notable example.) Given that God's resources and, as we might say, resourcefulness are infinite, we might be inclined to suppose, pre-reflectively, that *of course* God can create a law-governed world in which higher-order sentient creatures develop consistently with those laws, without thereby incurring the risk of suffering of the intensity

and on the scale that seems to characterize the history of our world. Why, for example, could God not have created a world in which the more complex, later-developing life forms are in all cases simply herbivores, and apt to die promptly and painlessly once they have reached a certain age – and so on, adding here further stipulations as required to head off other possible sources of suffering? But as various authors note, a scientific understanding of the processes whereby life has in fact emerged and developed in this universe, under law-governed conditions, very quickly reveals the complexity of the relationship between the various constituents of this narrative, so that there is a genuine question about whether predation, or even, say, viruses and parasitic forms of life, may be in some way necessary for the achievement of a fundamental good such as the emergence of creaturely complexity. Certainly, as our authors note, there seems to be some pressure to say that *relative to the laws of nature that obtain in our world*, some such connections may turn out to be necessary, so that relative to those laws, even the divine resources and resourcefulness cannot secure, or at least, cannot be sure of securing, certain core values without having to tolerate thereby a range of associated disvalues.

It might be replied: well, in that case, why should God not have made a life-enabling universe with *different laws*? Here our focus shifts from intra-scientific modal facts (those relative to the laws that in fact obtain) to extra-scientific modal facts. Here too, it is easy for our imagination to run ahead of what is in fact metaphysically possible. In recent years, again because of progress in the sciences, we have become more sensitive to the difficulty of envisaging the character of a life-consistent universe governed by laws different from those that in fact obtain, given that the actual universe appears to be 'finely tuned' to the possibility of life: this apparently well-established finding of modern cosmology suggests that very, very small adjustments to, say, the initial rate of expansion of the universe, or the relative values of the fundamental forces, would have had the result that the universe would not have been life-permitting.[1] Here developments in the sciences, while not

[1]Robin Collins cites the example of the cosmological constant, relevant to the expansion rate of the universe, noting that the probability of its value falling in the range required for the development of life is 1 in 10 to the power of 120. He adds: 'This is far more precision than would be required to hit a bull's eye the size of

directly concerned with the laws governing metaphysical possibility, nonetheless alert us to the ways in which, in our universe, there appears to be a tight, 'finely tuned' connection between the laws of nature and various fundamental values – notably, the core value of life itself – whose realization is enabled by those laws. It is a great strength of the contributions in this volume, I think, that the authors have a sophisticated understanding of the biological and other sciences that bear on these issues – two are indeed trained in the sciences – and can therefore write with due sensitivity to the relevance of scientific perspectives for an assessment of a range of intra- as well as extra-scientific modal facts of importance for these discussions.

Another response might be: in that case, why should we not give up on the idea that God will create a universe subject to laws that hold *uniformly*? For instance, holding fixed the laws of nature as we find them in our universe, why should God not intervene at any point when an animal is liable to experience significant pain, so as to suspend the law-governed operation of the relevant pain receptors, and to provide, miraculously, a behavioural prompt that will have the same action-guiding import as would have been produced by pain of the kind and intensity that would have occurred but for God's intervention – and acting so would surely present no difficulty for God, since God can, presumably, directly, that is, independently of the law-governed web of intra-creaturely causal relations, bring about a brain state that will place the creature in the requisite motivational state? (And since this is simply the same motivational state as would otherwise have arisen, there is no question of the creature's freedom being significantly compromised hereby, relative to what would have happened in the world as it is in fact constituted.) Since many Christians, and perhaps our authors too, are content with the possibility of miracles, so understood, why should God not act so?

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an atom by throwing a dart from the moon at the surface of the earth': Robin Collins, 'Fine-Tuning Is Evidence That God Exists', in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. Vanarragon (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), Ch. 2. As Elliott Sober's reply to Collins in that volume indicates, while the physics in these cases may be well established, there is dispute about what to make of these findings in philosophical terms.

Here we run directly into a difficult *axiological* question: such a world, in which the laws of nature are frequently suspended in the name of reducing creaturely pain and suffering, lacks the integrity of our world, where the natures of creatures express themselves without any such interference – allowing that these natures are still, of course, divinely established and sustained. *Perhaps* this law-suspending version of our world should be judged overall better than the actual world, but this is, I take it, not a judgement that we can make with any degree of confidence from our epistemic vantage point. In general, how are we to assess the relative value of global states of affairs such as these, allowing that there is, in fact, some objective ordering in such cases? And notably, in this case, how are we to support such a judgement, when there is evidently a weighty counter-value to the value of pain reduction, namely the value of creaturely natures retaining their causal integrity?[2]

One response to this understanding of these various constraints on our epistemic capacities would be to say: well, in that case, *let's simply give up this kind of enquiry*, and allow that these questions exceed our intellectual powers. Of course, none of our authors takes that view, not even, I think, with respect to the question of whether broadly philosophical, rather than theological, forms of investigation can be brought to bear on the modal and axiological questions that are posed in their essays. And I think they are right to persist, not least because while it may be hard to reach a definitive judgement on these matters, it is at the same time clear that our judgements can be more or less well informed, taking into account, for instance, developments in the sciences, and there is therefore a genuine field of enquiry here. But evidently, the symposiasts are also very much sensitive to these epistemic challenges, advancing their own views, especially insofar as they depend on philosophically grounded judgements, with a significant degree of epistemic caution. And this suggests, I think, one potentially fruitful way of reading the collection as a whole.

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[2]For further discussion, see Peter van Inwagen, 'The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence', in his *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), Ch. 3.

On first inspection, it is perhaps natural to take the approach of each symposiast to be, on some fundamental issues anyway, in competition with those of the other symposiasts. And that is right to the extent that in some respects, clearly, these views are mutually inconsistent. But given that each view is being advanced with a significant measure of epistemic humility, our authors will also allow, evidently, that there is some significant likelihood that one or another of the rival views will turn out to be closer to the truth (and perhaps even that the disjunction of these rival views is more likely to be correct than the author's preferred view). In these circumstances, a Christian theologian who favours one of the views advanced in this discussion over other, mutually exclusive views still has good reason to hope that these other views can be defended with a measure of plausibility. Why? Because no one of these views, considered in itself, is going to be, it would seem, a *compellingly strong* contender for truth. And what matters for Christian theology, therefore, is that a *disjunction of such views* should have some prospect of being true (where the truth of any one disjunct will entail the falsity of each of the other disjuncts).[3]

And on one natural reading, that is the sort of enquiry that we see played out in this volume: of course, each symposiast is committed to framing their own view in the strongest possible terms, and to that extent establishing its superiority over rival views, but at the same time, the authors are clearly engaged in a collaborative enterprise, and each takes time to consider how alternative views to the one they favour might be stated more forcefully, allowing for their different starting points and core convictions. In brief, the positions advanced in the book can be read as a collective response to the question: is it possible for Christian theology to provide a story about animal suffering, or perhaps in certain respects a story about why we cannot tell such a story, that is persuasive enough to meet whatever intellectual threshold needs to be met in this domain for Christian claims about divine creation and providence

[3]To explain the terminology here, suppose we take the letter P to stand for the view of one of our contributors, the letter Q to stand for the view of another contributor and so on. I take it that these views cannot all be true, as they are in some respects mutually inconsistent. But the disjunction P or Q or etc. could be true, and will be true providing that one of these views (one of the 'disjuncts' in this statement) is true.

to remain a live intellectual option?[4] The answer to that question, I am suggesting, is perhaps best cast in disjunctive form.

I have been offering a reading of our symposiasts' conversation that is framed by some reflections on the difficulties of reaching a view about the character of various modal and axiological facts. I want now to discuss, very briefly, two further issues that may be of help in framing that discussion. As the reader will have noticed, I am not seeking to intervene directly in our exchange as one further voice in the discussion – partly because I don't see how I could substantively improve on the earlier mapping of the dialectical space – but rather to move towards, for myself anyway, a deepened understanding of how we might think of the significance of this conversation, that is, what we might take it to have shown once it has been located within some wider or framing context.

Turning to the first of these further framing issues, let us briefly consider the question of whether there is a best possible world, where by 'possible world' is meant a way in which things might have been in their totality, here including within the boundaries of a given world both God, supposing there is a God in that world, and whatever God may have made. Without pursuing the question in any detail here, I will simply venture the view that there is no best, jointly or singly best, possible world: any state of affairs that might be advanced as a plausible candidate for counting as such a world will always be open to improvement, for instance, through the addition of one or more sentient creatures who lead contented lives, without detracting in any respect from the well-being of any other sentient creature. Here again, we are concerned with various potentially challenging global axiological judgements. We might wonder, for instance: perhaps the addition of these creatures would in some way detract from the aesthetic properties of such a world, for instance, because to ensure that they do not impinge negatively on the well-being of other creatures, they would need to be placed in a causally isolated region of the world, thereby undermining the causal integrity of the world. Or again: perhaps the addition of such creatures would not be possible via any law-governed process, so that in this respect the world would not, after all, count as an

[4]Here and elsewhere, I am taking 'providence' broadly to mean divine oversight of creation, extending to, for instance, eschatology.

improvement. Allowing for these and like complications, I take it that the judgement that there is no best possible world has a measure of intuitive plausibility and is, to say no more, as lively a contender for truth as the claim that there is such a world. And in that case, Christian theology can reasonably build on that supposition.

Allowing that we can proceed on this basis, we may then ask ourselves: how good must a God-involving possible world be if that world is to be consistent with the divine goodness? If we suppose that there is a uniquely best possible world, then there is *perhaps* some pressure to say: God must actualize that world, because not to do so would imply some deficiency in God's agency, since there is a created state of affairs of maximal value that it is open to God to realize, and God has chosen instead to actualize an inferior state of affairs.[5] But if there is no best possible world, then it is no objection to the claim of a given creation-involving world to be consistent with the divine goodness to say: God could have actualized a better possible world than this. Why not? Because, of course, on this view, the same objection could be posed whatever God might have created. So if the objection holds with respect to a given creation-involving possible world, giving us reason to think that the divine goodness is inconsistent with the actualization of that world, then it amounts to a case for supposing that God ought not to have created at all. And that seems too drastic a conclusion to draw. (If God does not create, then the world comprising God alone will be the actual world – and why should it count against the goodness of God if God should instead bring into existence a creation that is very good, allowing that it is not open to God to bring into being a creation that is unimprovably good?)

On this general picture, it seems we should suppose not that God should actualize the, or a, best possible world (there being no such world), nor that God is required to refrain from creating, but rather that God has adequate reason to bring about a creation, provided that it meets a certain minimum threshold of goodness: any such creation will be improvable, of course, but will still be

[5]I say 'perhaps' here, since it is not at all clear that from a Christian perspective, it is to be expected that God would actualize the best possible world, supposing there to be one. For a classic discussion of these issues, see Robert Adams, 'Must God Create the Best?', *Philosophical Review*, 81, no. 3 (1972): 317–32.

a worthy object of divine creative choice, provided that it is good enough. The question of how good is good enough is one that we can set aside for present purposes. Plausibly, such a world will need to be overall good and free from gratuitous disvalues (bracketing the question of how exactly we are to understand the 'gratuitousness' of a disvalue)[6] – but we might well suppose that a world will need to meet various other conditions as well if it is to count as consistent with the divine goodness, even allowing that there is no best possible world.

If we bring this framing assumption, that there is no best possible world, into our review of the discussion that has been presented in these pages, what difference might that make to our conception of the exchange? On one natural reading, each of our symposiasts is sketching a possible world: in one such world, the created order, considered as fallen, is pan-responsive (and there is no angelic fall); in another, it is not pan-responsive, and some of its central disvalues derive instead from an angelic fall; in another, it is not pan-responsive, and some smaller set of disvalues derive from such a fall; in another, there is no such fall, and no theodically significant moral responsiveness outside of the realm of human choosing, and in another, we should accept that the fallen character of the world is radically resistant to human understanding, so that none of the above stories is to be endorsed, though here too, of course, there will be a true story, one that is accessible from the divine vantage point. Let's suppose for the sake of discussion that, in axiological terms, the pan-responsive possible world, as sketched here, is ranked, confidently, above any possible world involving an angelic fall. If we were approaching this discussion with the background assumption that there is a best possible world, and in turn the background expectation that God will actualize that world, then this axiological ranking would give us reason to suppose that there is no angelic fall – because on this ranking, we can say that all the angelic fall worlds are inferior to the pan-responsive, fall-involving world, so that none of them can be the best possible world.

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[6]It is clear that some of our symposiasts allow that some disvalues in our world are 'gratuitous' in the sense that they need not have arisen had the freedom of creatures been differently exercised, but these token disvalues, arising from particular episodes of creaturely choice, will remain value-serving in a larger sense, in so far as it is good that creatures should have the freedom so to choose.

Immediately, various complications come into view. For instance, we might wonder whether these various sketches are to be read as accounts of possible worlds in their entirety or as accounts of parts of such a world: if the latter, then in principle, two or more sketches could prove to be true, supposing that there is more than one universe. Or again, there is a complication around the fact that, given the indeterministic understanding of creaturely freedom that is shared by most of the symposiasts, God may not be able to choose directly a given possible world involving creaturely freedom, but only the initial set up in such a world. And it will follow, for example, that a world involving a fall might be the best of the possible worlds accessible to God, even if another world is better, namely one of the same general kind where creatures exercise their freedom differently, so that there is no fall. But let us bracket such matters for present purposes.

If, instead, we approach our exchange with the background assumption that there is no best possible world, and, in turn, the assumption that the divine goodness is consistent with any world that meets a certain minimum threshold of value, then we will not be able to move at all directly (i.e. not without further argumentation concerning the nature of that threshold) from the observation that a pan-responsive world, involving fallenness, is to be ranked above any world involving an angelic fall to the conclusion that, most likely, there was no angelic fall. In other words, on this framing assumption, read as I have proposed, we should not suppose that the fundamental contribution of our symposiasts is to provide us with a ranking of possible worlds. Such a ranking would certainly be of interest in intellectual terms, but on the framing assumption that there is no best possible world, read as I have proposed, it would not of itself settle the question of how we should think of our own world. Why? Because the sketch of a given symposiast might turn out to have a relatively low ranking compared with those of other symposiasts, while still evidently meeting the threshold of value that would make the world so understood a worthy object of divine creative choice, in which case it would seem to have just as much a claim as those other sketches to be the actual world.

So, on this reading of the exchange, what matters is that a given sketch of God's providential and redeeming activity, with respect to suffering and struggle in the non-human world, should be persuasive enough to show that a world conforming to that

sketch has some prospect of meeting the relevant threshold of value. This reading gives us a further reason for thinking of our symposiasts' contributions non-competitively, since it suggests that, taken together, *each of their accounts* could be persuasive enough to establish that the world so understood is a worthy object of divine creative choice. The first of our reasons for thinking of these sketches non-competitively was epistemic: on that view, each sketch is advanced with a significant measure of epistemic caution, which suggests that Christian theologians have some reason to consider the viability of a disjunctive account of the nature of God's creative and providential activity, one that incorporates several and perhaps all of these sketches. The second reason for taking a non-competitive view is more metaphysical in nature: even supposing that we could produce a reliable ranking of the symposiasts' accounts, in axiological terms, confidently ranking some above others, provided that each account has a similarly weighty claim to meet the relevant threshold of value, then each will have a similarly weighty claim to be true. Here, the claim to truth of one account does not directly have any tendency to undercut the claim to truth of another, because multiple accounts could satisfy the relevant threshold of value.

I would like to close with one further potential framing consideration, which I shall introduce gesturally, rather than as a worked-out proposal. Even considered as a gesture, this account will make some highly contestable assumptions, but I offer it as one further perspective on how various metaphysical facts relevant to this debate may fall out. Let's suppose, for the sake of discussion, that God has made not only our cosmos but another just like it, and let's suppose that creaturely freedom turns out to have been exercised in that cosmos in just the same way, so that the two cosmoses share the same history: they are, then, qualitatively indistinguishable. The other day, I saw a seal pup on the Pembrokeshire coast. In the scenario we are envisaging, there is a qualitatively indistinguishable counterpart for that pup in this further cosmos, one that is also actual, but not our cosmos. We might ask: what is it that makes the seal pup that I saw that pup, and not another pup? On our scenario, we can't very well say: its properties (considered abstractly, so that each property, say the property of having a blotch on its nose, is multiply instantiable) make that seal pup the pup that it is. Why not? Because evidently there is another pup, different from the pup I saw, that shares exactly those properties. There is one clarification

we should note: by 'properties' here is meant intrinsic properties, that is, the properties the seal has not on account of its relation to anything else, but simply considered in itself, such as the property of having so many whiskers, or a blotchy nose, and so on.

Here again, we are approaching some difficult-to-understand modal questions, and I have no developed theory of these matters to offer, but this apparently simple thought experiment gives us some reason to say that a seal is the particular individual it is, not on account of conforming to a certain general type – not even a fully described type, where we pick out all of the seal's intrinsic features, its blotchy nose and so on, in exhaustive detail – but on account of standing concretely in certain causal relations, say, by being the seal that I saw, rather than the seal seen by another person. (Of course, this pushes our question about identity a step further back, since it presupposes the distinction between me and my counterpart in that second cosmos: the implication of this account is that to identify me as the very individual that I am, it will, in turn, be necessary to locate me in some further concrete causal context. Perhaps it is the divine mind that provides the terminus for this chain of contexts.) It's perhaps worth adding that this result does not seem to depend on there actually being a second cosmos that is qualitatively indistinguishable from our own. It is enough that it is possible that there be such a cosmos: in that case, what makes our pup the pup it is cannot be simply its general, intrinsic properties, because it is possible for several individuals to exemplify those properties, and in that case, having those properties cannot, after all, be what makes this pup, uniquely, the pup it is.

This brief train of reflection invites us to suppose that what might initially seem to be a straightforward solution to the problem of animal suffering may not, after all, be available. The solution would run: to ensure that this seal pup, the very one that I saw, does not suffer, it would be enough for God to create an individual with those properties within a suffering-free world. But on the view we have been considering, it would not follow that this individual was that very pup, simply by virtue of sharing all of its general properties. And if we suppose that, in fact, what makes a given creature the very individual that it is tied in some way to its being located within a given causal context – indeed, not just a causal context of a given type, but one that consists of certain concrete

individuals, standing in certain causal relations to that individual – then we might conclude that we can't straightforwardly envisage this very pup existing in a radically different kind of causal context, as proposed in this thought experiment.[7]

To develop this proposal a little, we might try to trace back the existence of the pup that I saw to the point of its origination. We can then ask: what makes it the case that this pup, and not some other, came into being at that point? Reasoning similarly, we might say: it's not enough to suppose that this pup will have come into existence provided that an egg and sperm satisfying the relevant general description were united. What matters, rather, is that the very egg and sperm that gave rise to this pup were united. Without spelling out the case further, it seems that in this way we can begin to track the very causal conditions that need to obtain for this very pup to exist back to a time before it existed; and having identified those conditions, we can then reason similarly with respect to them, since for those very conditions to obtain, it is not enough that there should be some prior state of affairs that is picked out simply with respect to the general properties that it exemplifies. If this line of reflection, or something like it, should hold – and certainly it makes a number of controversial assumptions, and it is not obvious that it does hold – then we have some reason to say that the existence of this pup as the very pup that it is is indexed to a wider causal context, one that extends backwards in time to periods before the pup's existence – and once it is widely enough drawn, this wider

[7]Mats Wahlberg offers the following thought experiment: 'Suppose that God would create – directly – an exact molecular duplicate of a certain, individual pelican. If the original pelican – which is a product of evolution – is a "creaturely self", then so is the molecular copy of that pelican. But the latter is not a product of evolution, so a process of evolution cannot be the only possible way for God to create creaturely selves': 'Was Evolution the Only Possible Way for God to Make Autonomous Creatures? Examination of an Argument in Evolutionary Theodicy', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 77, no. 1 (2015): 37–51: 46. Suppose we allow this point; it may even so be true that the only possible way for God to create a given pelican as the very pelican it is is by way of an evolutionary process. The 'only way' to this very pelican may then be via this process. My thanks to Christopher Southgate for this reference.

causal context will have to include, we might suppose, the suffering and struggle of many non-human creatures.[8]

Here is a further, very tentative but not entirely unmotivated framing assumption that we can bring to our review of our symposiasts' debate, namely the idea that the causal context of an individual, that is, its standing concretely in certain causal relations, where those relations extend backwards in time before the origination of the thing, enters into its identity. This third framing assumption points in the direction of the thought that, as well as the many other values that are realized in our universe, of the kinds carefully recorded and affirmed in the essays of our symposiasts, there is also a further value that consists in the fact that hereby certain individuals have come to be, individuals whose existence is in various ways indexed to the very causal history that has unfolded in this world.

This suggests a further reading of the exchange between our symposiasts. Each is sketching a rather different causal story, reading 'cause' very broadly in the ways discussed in their exchange, by reference to which the world as we observe it today came to be. And those stories can be assessed in qualitative terms: perhaps this story is to be preferred to that, considered as an account of suffering and struggle that can be shown to cohere in some way with what we know of the divine goodness. (Here we return to the issues we discussed in relation to our second framing assumption.) But on this further framing assumption, the stories offered by our symposiasts, considered as stories about *our universe*, also set out the concrete causal context with respect to which it is possible for this seal pup, and other non-human creatures, to exist as the very individuals that they are. On this view, then, when we consider the connection between values and disvalues in our world, we should take into account not only how across universes of a certain type, values of a given type will be connected to disvalues of a particular type, including episodes of non-human suffering, in this or that manner, but also how the disvalues that have arisen in the history of our universe may be connected, in some metaphysically deep way,

[8]For further development of a 'non-identity theodicy' of broadly this kind, see Vince Vitale, *Non-identity Theodicy: A Grace-Based Response to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), Ch. 6.

to the existence of the very non-human creatures that populate our world.

These reflections invite us to think that from the vantage point of Christian theology, the history of our universe, with its struggle and suffering, is perhaps a story of how the particular targets of the divine love have come to be: that is, the very individuals who are the objects of that love. On this view, the divine love is active not simply to bring good out of suffering and struggle for the various subjects that undergo suffering and struggle, but also by way of suffering and struggle to constitute those subjects as the individuals that they are – that is, to call them into being, as a condition of calling them into a share of the divine life.[9]

[9]In the course of this discussion, I have tried to preserve a position of neutrality with respect to the positions sketched by our symposiasts, given the role I have assigned myself of examining the significance of the earlier essays *as a set*. And it may be wondered whether I have departed from that stance in these closing lines, by writing that God constitutes creatures as the individuals they are 'by way of' suffering and struggle – which could be taken to mean that God intends that suffering and struggle as a means to the creation of those very individuals. My thanks to Paul Fiddes and Michael Lloyd for raising this insightful question. The text could be read that way, but might also be read differently. For instance, if we take creatures to be free in the libertarian sense, and suppose that God is in time and lacks foreknowledge of creaturely free choices, and if we adopt the view on identity outlined here, then we might say that God does not intend that precisely these creatures should exist (those that result from the track that the creation has in fact followed), but foresees that there may be a process of suffering and struggle that will result in these very creatures, and resolves, of course, to love those creatures if they should come to be. Here the divine love is active in sustaining a process that in fact involves suffering and struggle and that in fact constitutes these individuals as the very individuals they are, but without intending suffering and struggle. I am grateful to all the symposiasts for their very instructive comments on an earlier draft of this reflection.