Amputees in the Image of God

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The Amputation Objection and the Problem of Evil

Amputations—however they may happen—are real pain and suffering. Few dispute this. There is something deeply wrong about them. And they do not seem like the kind of thing to exist in an ideal world. They are as cracks in a theistic world; potential proof of poor craftsmanship. God might not be specifically to blame, but He still seems culpable for letting such natural evils happen on his watch. If God is rightly described with the classical "omnis"—omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent—then the facts of suffering and evil in the world are a real explanatory problem. Of special note are those pointed egregious evils which do not seem attached to any "greater good," that is, gratuitous evils. Cases of apparently "greater good" are

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hereby excluded, thus leaving out any cases where a soldier lost a limb by diving on a grenade since that sacrificial act served to protect his squad, a potentially greater good. Nor are surgical amputations counted where "life over limb" logic necessitates severing a limb to halt the spread of gangrene. Instead, the kind of evil at issue here is that category of horrendous evil wherein an amputation is gratuitous, lacking any greater good.[2]

Gratuitous amputations easily fit within the philosopher's topic known as the Problem of Evil. Simply phrased the problem of evil says an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God has the knowledge, means, and incentive to prevent all evil; yet evil exists, persists even, and with great quantity. Hence no such God exists. Modified phrasings of this classic problem include the problem of suffering and the most prominent and modern

[2]These "gratuitous amputations" literally lack any greater good. This excludes cases of *apparently* gratuitous evil where they only *seem* to be gratuitous, but in fact are not.

form, the Evidential Argument from Evil. Here the fact of amputations finds acute expression as *probable* evidence against a tri-omni God. According to the Evidential Argument from Evil, there exist evils—such as amputations—which lack any accessible, discernible, or demonstrable greater good. These are gratuitous evils. Yet no such evils would exist if God exists. Hence, God seems not to exist. Typical Christian theodicies attempt to show why God allows evil. Meanwhile, "defenses" are more humbly offered as *merely possible* reasons why God would allow such evil. Either way, gratuitous amputations, seem to suggest that God is not doing his job or his desk is vacant.

Applying the category of gratuitous amputations to the evidential argument from evil produces what can be called the Evidential Amputee Objection (EAO). This paper addresses the EAO. Other kinds of evil might be

susceptible to the defenses offered here, but amputations are the specific kind of evil in view.

Developing the Evidential Amputee Objection

How might gratuitous amputations pose a problem for theism? Classical theism postulates a sovereign God who is in charge of everything from directing the planetary cycles to counting the hairs on everyone's head, and there would be no event in nature or choice of man that could surprise God nor happen without God's action or permission. Gratuitous evil, if it occurred, would puncture that inflated theory, reducing it to non-classical theism or non-theism.

Some respected names in Christian thought have taken that very route, fleeing from classical theism before the Problem of Evil's frontal assault. The shelter of classical theism lays abandoned and war-torn, neglected by so much analytic philosophy. Theologians Bruce Little and Ron Nash, together with philosophical luminaries like

William Lane Craig and Alvin Plantinga have aligned awkwardly with open theists such as Greg Boyd and William Hasker.[3] Odd allegiances, like these, spanning conservative and liberal camps, might seem striking. But

[3]Bruce Little, "God and Gratuitous Evil," in *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain* , Chad Meister and James K. Dew Jr., eds. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 38-52. Ron Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderv, 1988), 221. William Lane Craig explicitly denied classical theism in a public interview at Texas A&M University, see "Faith, Science, and Philosophy: An Interview with William Lane Craig," College Station, TX: Veritas Forum at Texas A&M University, 21 March 2013. He has implicitly denied classical theism in "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6. (1989): 172-88. William Hasker and Greg Boyd are well known open theists, thereby denying classical theism, and are widely published on the problem of evil. Alvin Plantinga's *God Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) is considered the touchstone for rebutting the logical problem of evil. In it, Plantinga stumbles into Molinism—wherein God selects from counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, actualizing only some of them in the "real world." And it was the limited options afforded to Him by this counterfactual realm which dictated that any comparable great creation would include evil on par with this world. Plantinga valiantly defends a robust sense of human free will (libertarian freedom), but sacrifices a facet of omnipotence and potentially reinterprets classical creation doctrine. Namely, there exists a realm which is neither God nor God's creation—the counterfactual realm—yet no such realm has metaphysical entrance in classical theism. Concerning omnipotence, counterfactuals represent a logically possible but metaphysically impossible state of affairs. God's omnipotence, then, is curtailed to accommodate logical possibilities that not even God can do. According to Plantinga's free will defense, God cannot, for example, make a world in which Butch refuses to take the.$20,000 bride when offered it.

heavy pressure from the Problem of Evil is just dangerous enough and just drastic enough to force strange alliances.

However, this retreat from the fortified borders of classical theism is, in my view, too hasty. To quote Alvin Plantinga, it is not "warranted." It forsakes much of the refined and distilled work of roughly nineteen centuries of hard fought orthodoxy. It claims that St. Anselm, St. Augustine, and St. Aquinas were all wrong regarding God's nature; their views on God were too far-sighted. The systematic integrity of classical theism is lost for the sake of strengthening defenses on just one of the fronts. Classical theism is left behind as modern trends retreat to Molinism, Open Theism, and Deism. Put another way, they have *conceded* to the problem of evil admitting that evil *does* disprove the all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God.

I do not propose such confrontational claims lightly since these men are all smarter than I; but one need not be

especially smart to have sufficient and compelling reasons to disagree with experts. A full demonstration of their erroneous abandonment of classical theism merits more discussion than this symposium allows. Plus it would be tangential to the ministerial aim of this paper. The main aim here is to give some useful rebuttals to the EAO. To dignify a bit of both of these goals, it is contended here that the EAO need not compel a retreat from classical theism, but can be rebutted instead with a "greater-good" defense, specifically through the doctrine of the *imago dei*. This paper is not an attempt, however, to *resolve* the problem of evil—emotional force and all. Instead, only a partial explanation is offered. It is admitted that academic lectures and papers are thin and flat. They are mere words and paper where shared hugs and helping hands are equally needed.

Gratuitous and Discriminatory Amputation

Some amputations do not immediately seem to threaten God's character or existence. Customary "greater good theodicies" can point to greater goods that are readily visible, for example, in cases of surgical amputation, where a human life is saved; or in natural consequences where a person loses a finger doing something ill-advised. These may threaten God's character at some level, but they are not the strongest evidence to that effect since they are too easily identified as traditional greater-goods like free-will, love, punishment, or the soul-building theodicy (courage, valor, loyalty, life-saving, etc.).[4]

[4]The classic work on the soul-building theodicy, A.K.A.: the Irenean Soul-Making Theodicy, is John Hick's *Evil and the God of Love*, (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 1966). Hick resorts to the image of God doctrine considerably in his work, however, he focuses on the development of human character in terms of "christ-likeness." That dimension can be thought of as a facet of the image of God doctrine (a la, John 13:13-17; Rom 8:29; Eph 4:22-24; 1 Pet 2:21). However the emphasis in this paper is the aspect of authority within the *imago dei* passage in Genesis 1:26-28. Man is to represent God to the world by a right exercise of God's delegated authority.

Other cases of amputation, perhaps most cases, are not so easily identified with "greater goods." Certain moral evils (i.e., evil caused by moral agency) are so excessive, malicious, or otherwise devoid of redeeming circumstances that they are *prima facie* gratuitous. Likewise, natural evils (i.e., evil not apparently caused by a moral agent) like birth defects, or degenerative diseases like flesh eating bacteria, or everyday accidents can all incur amputation. These may or may not be "gratuitous" depending on whether they do in fact lack a "greater-good" context.[5]

Amputation however constitutes another problem for theism besides apparent gratuity, namely God can be charged with discrimination. Why does God discriminate

[5]Of course, there may be "greater goods" which humans cannot or do not know. And that possibility might be reasonably inferred from other evidences, such as the moral argument for God, resurrection apologetics, and fulfilled prophecy in Scripture, even while there is no available evidence for a particular reason behind a particular evil. Arguments addressing such a large-scale topic as "God's existence" can benefit from a bird's eye view, where no single subtopic is allowed to dictate all the philosophical commitments within one's systematic theology.

against amputees such that they are never healed while many cancer patients, bird-flu victims, and all sorts of other hurting human beings are cured? "Permanent" ailments like amputation are never cured, so neither should the spontaneous recovery of cancer patients or flu victims count towards divine intervention. Evils, like amputations, seem less problematic (than at first glance) if there is some chance for a *Deus Ex Machina* to miraculously intervene and "rescue" the occasional amputee, as He seems to do for some cancer patients. But amputees, unfortunately, always seem to get the shaft, making it unclear that God does in fact heal cancer patients. Perhaps cancer patients are not healed by God either; they are healed by natural forces like medicine, placebo effect, or anomalous recovery. Otherwise, there should be comparable amounts of healing among victims of amputation, encephalitis, AIDS or other "incurables." The discrimination objection effectively expands the problem of evil by multiplying real suffering

together with apparent injustice and arbitrariness on God's part. God seems all the more unlikely.

This line of objection can be answered by at least four routes. First, the theist may categorize some evils differently from others, with some evils being "curable" through miracles, while other evils fall in a different category of permanence, amputations for example. These permanent features are a kind of unchanging or incurable consequence of evil, an evil of finality where the person's earthly status in that regard is fixed and unchanging.[6] Just as God allows some evils which seem gratuitous but have overwhelming redemptive value apparent only to God, so

[6]It may be allowed for the sake of argument that "evil" includes most any suffering, loss, sickness, moral error, etc. From a molinist perspective it is coherent to assert that a person's definitive counterfactuals may include permanent features like amputations such that, "Were Butch to become an amputee he will stay an amputee." From a non-molinist perspective there would be no such necessity to anything whatsoever apart from God and His nature, hence any permanent features are either true of God himself (i.e.: as a subset of his immutability) or are chosen and created (i.e.: metaphysically originating in God's knowledge, will, and action).

there may be permanent features which suit God's inscrutable but redemptive plans.

This option is logically and metaphysically possible, though it might not be the most intuitively obvious or compelling route. While this option might seem obscure it is no stretch for Christian theology. It already exists for Christians in the doctrine of "hard heartedness"—such as Pharaoh's willful rebellion—and the "thorn IN the flesh"—as with Paul's mysterious ailment that God refused to heal.[7] Also history is set and unchanging. Any evil historical events would already serve in populating this category. If a person is murdered, that state of affairs becomes a fixed and unchanging point. Sure it is metaphysically coherent to talk about restored mortal life—as in resurrection doctrine—but there has yet to be another documented and corroborated case comparable in

[7]Rom 9:17-18; 2 Cor 12:7-10

evidential force to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[8] Likewise, we would consider brain death a permanent feature, which even classical theists can admit is highly unlikely to be reversed, even if God were prone to miraculous healing.

Second, it may be the case that God rarely or never heals cancer patients too, or encephalitis victims, etc. By this thought, the cases of "healing" are not in fact healings but normal results from the range of treatments so far available. There may or may not be divine intervention, but if there were, it would not be the sort of noticeable or natural-law-suspending kind to qualify as "miracles." God could be involved providentially or not at all, but "healing" and "miracle" would be overstatements.

[8]Here modest skepticism is assumed, but it is allowed that the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection is not blind fideism and is defensible as evidenced by the exhaustive work, on the resurrection, by Michael Licona and Gary Habermas. One need not assent to this argument for the Resurrection of Jesus to admit that its evidence base is impressive compared to other similar resurrection claims. Any doctrine of future resurrection (for the rest of mankind) can, here, be saved for another day.

Third, it may be that God *does* heal at least some amputees—but rarely. There is rare precedent of a healed amputee in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus healed the guard's ear overzealously severed by St. Peter (Luke 22:51). More often, it seems that God does not heal amputees. Rather than intrude extravagantly, God seems to allow things to "play out" on their own—amputations included. By a secular interpretation that allowance indicates divine absence. By a deistic interpretation, that absence indicates apathy, moral indifference, or even divine finitude—where He is not able to intervene without contradicting the self-sustaining mechanics He intends for the universe. Regardless, God's non-intrusion would seem to suggest He does not care or God does not exist, either way, God stays out of it. But the rarity of supernatural healings need not draw such dire dilemmas. It need not be divine indifference or unholy absence. It could be the demure distance of a gentleman. Perhaps God steps aside,

clearing space for people to step in and reflect God as divine image-bearers to the world. This option leads to the next point.

Fourth, it may be that God heals amputees often, but through his Image-bearers. God allows medical doctors and other people to be extensions of his healing presence on earth so that any surgically restored limbs, prosthetics, digit or limb transplants, rehabilitation, and reorientation—all of these can count as an instrumental divine healing where God uses people to achieve his healing work. This brand of healing rarely if ever achieves fully restored function or appearance, but it does not have to do so to effectively soften the force of the EAO.

In the view of this author, all four of these responses have merit. Some evils may be permanent effects, at least as far as medical science allows. God might not be miraculously healing people of other ailments as often as religious claimants may think. At least one or two

miraculous healings have happened for amputees thus showing that it is not theologically impossible for God, even if it is rare. And medical practice can be seen as a spiritually weighted endowment for the purpose of restoring amputees to functionality in work, at home, and in the rest of society. Whether the surgery is a digit transplant, a skin graft, or an implant; medical doctors and any therapists can administer healing no less meaningfully than the work of clergy.

Amputees and the Image of God

In addressing the EAO, the *imago dei* ("Image of God") doctrine—already mentioned—is a biblical option for appertaining forms of classical theism such as "People of the Book" (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity). By this doctrine man is said to be "in God's image" somehow "reflecting" God by our manner or nature. Emerging from Genesis 1:26-28, the concept correlates with gender

distinctions,[9] with authority over the earth,[10] and with blessing, procreation, and flourishing.[11] Setting aside disputes over what all is included in the *imago dei* it may be minimally asserted that (1) the *imago dei* identifies man's nature as a reflector-of-God, that is, man is not God nor merely animal, but rather a God-like creature that has been made to point attention back to his Maker; (2) the *imago dei* either is dominion or enables man for some measure of dominion which, either way, alludes to God's innate dominion over creation; and (3) the *imago dei* is not entirely lost since the Fall in Genesis 3.[12]

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[9]"[I]n the image of God he created them, male and female he created them" Genesis 1:27b, ESV.

[10]"[L]et them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth (ibid., 1:26)," and ". . . subdue [the earth] and have dominion over it (1:28b).

[11]"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'" (1:28a).

[12]The "image" is preserved, at least partially, as suggested by Genesis 5:3; 9:6—both occurring after the effacing of humanity with a sin nature in Genesis 3. See also, 1 Cor 11:7. The aspect of the *imago dei* employed most heavily in this article is the "Dominion View" of the *imago dei* also known as the Socinian View. However, in treating dominion as only *an* aspect of the *imago dei* and not *the* fullness of the

Recapitulating this doctrine, Man is to glorify God by reflecting God's authority through our delegated and reflective authority. Here it will be argued that amputations can be redeemed, in part, by exercising the *imago dei*.[13] Put more forcefully, amputations constitute a means of reflecting God's authority. Exercised rightly, that authority is a good thing. Mankind is endowed with great power over his environment, hence, with great responsibility he goes forth to "subdue" it and have "dominion" over it.

Imago Dei my own view falls more in line with the open view of John Calvin who allows that the *Imago Dei* can mean a whole host of features which man shares with His creator God (see, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.15.3-4, Henry Beveridge, trans. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008], 106-7.

[13]I do not address whether the *Imago Dei* is a state, action, or capacity for action. I assume that man *is* in God's image but exercises that nature well or poorly depending on his character and his actions.

Meaningfulness and the Mythical Upper Limit[14]

Broadly framing the EAO is the fact that there is no upper limit to how much suffering can be redeemed through transcendent meaning. The *imago dei* is just that, a doctrine of divine meaning—where humans *mean* something more than pain and pleasure, life or death, self or society. Humans are *meaners* pointing attention back to their source of existence, the Divine authority of life. It is hard to grasp on large-scale how there is no known upper limit to the amount of suffering that can be redeemed through transcendent meaning, but some small-scale illustrations might help.

The pain of child birth is offset by the joy of new life; the exhaustion, injuries, soreness, and abuse suffered in a sport can be outweighed by the joy of competition; and

[14]The application of meaningfulness to the problem of evil is not original with me. See also, Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1999), throughout.

in the case of amputations, image-bearing humans can still exercise their God-given duties and privileges within greater redeeming contexts. Jacob fathered the twelve tribes of Israel despite his permanent hip injury. Isaac conveyed God's blessings to his children despite his blindness. Even Jesus in the resurrection retained his crucifixion scars suggesting that His glorified body is somehow more perfect with wounds intact.[15]

In the problem of evil broadly, it cannot be emphasized enough that life is about more than pain and pleasure so that boundless depths of meaning can still abide, potentially, drowning out the loudest cries of 'Foul!' It is not pain and suffering that we cannot bear, but *meaningless* pain and suffering. When life is felt or experienced as meaningless then there does not seem to be

[15]This is not to say that amputees will continue as amputees in heaven. Presumably amputations are not part of our "glorified bodies" (1 Cor 15:42-49), though in this fallen world amputations can be more instrumentally valuable than whole-bodiedness in at least some cases.

any pain or suffering too trivial to ignite a burning sense of injustice or despair. But when the Christian theist searches the depths of value and significance in life beyond mere pleasure, normalcy, or physical wholeness he can find that there is more to life than this life; he finds hints of life eternal, the life that is only found in God whom man is to reflect to the world. This present world order takes on new significance if the *summum bonnum* is not nature, or part of nature, but transcends nature. He is God, and He alone is where our beatitude is found.[16]

Pain, Pleasure and the Problem with the Problem of Evil

[16]This point is not simply that "Heaven will even the score," though that concept is valid for classical Christian theodicy. Even without considering heaven, amputations can in some cases be redeemed by transcendentally meaningful contexts where one's life and body are theologically significant and not just naturally accident. Moreover, since the kind of God at issue here is that of classical theism, then there is no more valuable being, no conceivably better personage more beautiful or good than God. Hence turning one's attention to Him is no triviality, but is the consuming telos of all creation.

The *imago dei* is a semantic doctrine, that is, it suggests a particular kind of meaningfulness to man. This meaningfulness constitutes an additional dimension for consideration within the problem of evil. It is not enough to find a plethora of painful cases, and assume that that, in itself, threatens classical theism.[17] Classical theism is not built around *pleasure*, much less *man's pleasure*, much less *man's earthly pleasure*. To undermine classical theism in its robust form, one cannot presume a simplistic "pain vs. pleasure-rubric" commonly assumed within the problem of evil. By that rubric, if God is good then man should be pleased, perpetually; if man is not perpetually pleased then there is no good God.

[17]This is not to say that pain and pleasure are trivial or useless to classical theism, but neither are they the whole picture. Classical theism does have an explanatory problem regarding horrendous evils, great pain and suffering, or apparently gratuitous suffering; but unless the concept of meaningfulness—as suggested in the *imago dei*—is also considered, then the antitheist position is merely a woefully incomplete. For more on the problem of horrendous evil see Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*.

To be sure, refined expressions of the problem of evil avoid this simplistic hedonistic characterization. But several tendencies in modern scholarship suggest this view aptly describes much modern thought on the problem of evil, and thus, the EAO. One such trend is that of hedonistic ethical systems such as Desirism, Utilitarianism, and Egoism which are as popular as ever. In those systems "the good" generally equates to "pleasure."[18] Also, neurological trends in psychology tend to reduce mental states to brain states (mind-brain identity theory) and thus abstract states such as joy and suffering, fulfillment and discontent, meaningfulness and meaninglessness, are thereby pressured towards reinterpretation as objectively measurable data, namely, physical pain and physical

[18]This is not to say that these ethical systems all treat "good" in terms of "physical pleasure." Other kinds of pleasure may be allowed, but in stretching the term beyond its physical sense the term risks overlapping with things that are not particularly "pleasant" such as a sense of meaningfulness, accomplishment, duty (etc.) about one's self on mile 13 of a marathon. The desirable features of that run can be called "pleasure" metaphorically not literally.

pleasure. Pain and pleasure receptors with their chemical equivalents are much more quantifiable than "joy" or "suffering." Furthermore, the shift from the logical problem of evil to the more recent evidential argument from evil implies a shift from abstract "evil" to concrete "pain," hence implying that pain and pleasure are close-enough approximations of "evil" and "good" that they are usefully interchangeable.

Listeners who buy into this hedonistic rubric have already stepped outside of a biblical theistic worldview—it should not be surprising when such people abandon God-belief. *That* kind of God never existed, and the real fact of pain and the absence of pleasure are easy defeaters for Santa God. But this hedonistic framing, is not as big a problem for theism proper, as it is for the problem of evil itself. Numerous Biblical and otherwise theistic notions point out a deeper richer portrait of man and nature than simply "the pursuit of pleasure." There is beatitude, there is

obedience, there is charity, there is martyrdom, there is the *Imago Dei*, and all of these elucidate how man can *mean* something far bigger than simply pain or pleasure.

The doctrine of the *imago dei* points out an overarching purpose for man where pleasure is not the main objective but rather a correlate or effect of a bigger objective. Pleasure is not outlined, explicated, nor necessarily alluded to in the *imago dei*. Presumably people have some improved chance of "fun" or "happiness" in living out their purpose in life, and these would be "pleasant," but pleasure can be distinguished from other concepts such as "flourishing," "well-being," "*beatitude*," or "*eudaimonia*" which affirm higher values than mere "pleasure."[19] Take "flourishing" for example. A person

[19]"Pleasure" is a restrictive term for its vagueness. If pleasure is stretched so widely as to include all "contentment," "happiness," "joy," "that-which-is-desired," "beatitude," "fun," "delight," "meaningfulness," "eudemonia," etc. then most all morality is but shades of hedonism. But this expansion is unhelpful, since there are valuable states of being which have no particular "pleasure" to them. In writing this paper right now, I want to be here, but I have no physical

may flourish for a length of time yet only experience pleasure sporadically during that time. Or, a person may experience pleasure without flourishing, or flourish with only a latent and future pleasure to look forward to amidst his present hardship.

In the *imago dei* flourishing is the more suitable concept such that people are to, "be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28).[20] The *imago dei* speaks more to meaningfulness than to mere pleasure. If man does or is supposed to reflect God as His image, then man is a symbol of a different realm. Human nature points to supernature.

"pleasure" nor "pain" consciously occurring in my being. Rather it is the abstract, conscious awareness that "I want to be here writing this" which would have to be called "pleasure." But to call this state "pleasure," is not how I feel now. My state is better described as "contentment" and the reason for that contentment is that I see my work as having existential relevance, a kind of meaningfulness tied into my reason for being alive, namely to point out truth, to bless others, and to glorify God. I take all of these pursuits to be expressions or implications within the *imago dei*. I have full confidence that my pleasure will result from all of those things but neither do I do those things to get pleasure. Meaning is the motivation, pleasure but an accident.

[20]I do not distinguish whether man's flourishing is an effect of the *imago dei*, a component of the *imago dei*, or identical with the *imago dei*. That nuance is outside the purview of this paper.

Man is a sign of God. Sure, pleasure is liable to arise when people exercise their purpose, but that does not mean that pleasure is the highest value, the defining feature of goodness, nor the most rightful pursuit. Retooling ethics hedonistically flattens out the complex landscape of ethics, reinterpreting man in animalistic terms where "flourishing" is extruded from any teleological purpose in man, any divine intention for man, and all that is left to pursue is pleasant feelings just like the animals.[21]

Factoring the *imago dei back* into the EAO exposes new depths where pleasure is not the highest value. Amputees have obviously known pain and suffering, but they still may have access to that meaningfulness for which people are made, and so they can have an overall better life

[21]Utilitarian John Stuart Mill attempts to distinguish "quality" of pleasure from Jeremy Betham's "quantity" rubric. But the further removed he gets from a strictly physical description of "pleasure"—as Bentham would have it—the less his sense of "pleasure" looks distinct from other categories such as "contentment," "fulfillment," or "peace." In other words, Mill uses "pleasure" so loosely that hedonism morphs into a hodgepodge of virtue ethics, ethics of care, or any number of other systems ascribing moral value to non-physical pleasure.

than the whole-bodied playboy gallivanting across the globe with inherited wealth, numbed by abundant pleasures. Where meaning matters (or can matter) more than pleasure, the EAO must be reworked to account for more than just gratuitous pain. The antitheist must show that cases of pain not only fail to have redemptive pleasures tied to them, but all other redemptive contexts must likewise fail as well, including the whole spate of ethical options such as flourishing and meaningfulness. For pain to be gratuitous it must separate the individual from greater meaningful contexts where higher goods outweigh lost pleasure. The problem with the problem of evil, then, is its tendency to mistake pleasure for the highest good. The *imago dei* doctrine talks past hedonism, to a teleological worldview, where people are put on earth *for* a given purpose/s established by God. Pleasure, health, or physical wholeness can occur for the faithful but so can pain, sickness, or amputation, all without prohibiting

participation in the *imago dei*, and all without having to rob the amputee of redemptive meaning or flourishing.

Amputees In the Image of God

The *imago dei* is not a physical form, since God is spirit (John 4:24). So, it is possible (all else being equal) for people to bear His image while lacking in normal physical form. In this case, the amputee still can bear the *imago dei*, still can exercise a degree of dominion over the earth, still manifest fruitfulness and flourishing. Even while admitting the real loss amputees experience, there remain limitless realms of redemptive value which might counterbalance it.[22]

[22]Notice, this point is not that a neo-natal amputation, for example, is excused if that person gets some good result like an eventual job as mayor, or a big family. The ends do not justify the means; that would fall into the utilitarian fallacy. Utilitarian ethics does not require a dilemma context, and utilitarian ethics allow the "means" to be ethically neutral *until* the results are in. What I propose here is that some finite goods are genuinely good but only occur, or best occur (relative to certain persons) in correlation with real evils. Amputation as such is still evil, but in dilemma contexts amputations are not "as

In this *imago dei* defense one need not argue that the various evils of the world, such as amputations are the only way to bring about comparable goods. Rather, the argument can be that amputations are a kind of obstacle to God-like authority that man would not otherwise encounter, yet that obstacle makes for one more way that God's authority is manifest. When the anti-theist objects to God's goodness because God allows amputations, consistency demands he also object to man's goodness for allowing it too—since man is supposed to be a delegate authority of God. Likewise, when man helps to heal amputations through surgery, prosthetics, and therapy God can likewise

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such" but would be component of complex moral events. Amputations, like all real-world moral judgments should be considered in light of moral events. "Moral event" is my own term for any event of moral weight such that various aspects are liable to contribute morally including aspects like the act itself, the active agent, the character or virtue involved, the motivations, the means, the manner, the results, and other contextual cues. Treated as a moral event, amputations would only be justified if done ethically—such as from good intentions, in dilemma contexts, to avoid greater evil, to serve a greater good, etc. Amputations which serve to save a life, or preserve freedom from tyranny, for example, are regrettable but good.

be glorified and his goodness recognized. Man's limited but real authority over ailments is an extension of God's authority according to the *imago dei*.

Presumably, man is to reflect God to the world because it is good for God to have delegate authorities bearing His image in their representative rulership. Yet man would hardly understand or appreciate that rulership unless there is at least an analogous experience of it. God rules over a *fallen* world, a world that can say, "No Thanks," a world that can usurp authority, ignore her maker, defy conscience, and indulge various limitations in all their mortal inglory.[23] The scene is akin to teenagers disrespecting and rejecting parental authority until they try

[23]One may object that God did not have to create. This is true but hardly resolves the problem of how God is to share His creative goodness—and it is good to share goodness—without creating. And by order of necessity, it is impossible for God to create a being that is infinite. In creating limitations, there is necessarily less good occurring in creation than exists in the creator. It is not enough to point out "less good" and fault that as "bad." Less good is still good, and fitting for an all-good God.

their own hand at parenting. Now God could bring about comparable goods without including amputations (or similar evils).[24] But would man have then encountered the

[24]This claim runs contrary to the views of Alvin Plantinga and others. As alluded to in the introduction, I object to Plantinga's molinist treatment of the problem of evil, yet not for metaphysical or logical problems per se but for theological objections. In the book *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Plantinga proposes that there are logical possibilities that not even God can do. This view redefines "omnipotence" for Plantinga God, and clearly distinguishes His brand of theism from classical theism wherein God is understood to be able to all that is logically possible. Because it is logically possible to create a world where "Jack takes a $20,000 bribe" then God can do that, never minding what Molinism suggests. In Plantinga's view, God's omnipotence is vastly limited, since he proposes logically coherent states that God cannot achieve. Some "rule" or counterfactual realm dictates that limit to God. And an externally limited God is neither infinite nor omnipotent. Second, classical theism embraces creation *ex nihilo* wherein everything that exists is either God or God's creation, but since molinism touts a realm of "middle knowledge" that is not God's nature or creation, then molinism lies outside of classical theism. Third, molinism posits a realm of middle knowledge wherein there is no grounding in God's nature or God's creation (i.e., the grounding problem), hence there is no causal grounding to give that realm existence whereby that "knowledge" could have truth-makers; hence middle knowledge is not even knowledge. And fourth, molinism does not solve the freedom vs. foreknowledge dilemma it was originally developed to solve. Namely, people's choices are not dictated by God but by counterfactual and future- factual "woulds" in the realm of middle-knowledge. But neither are those "woulds" dictated by us since we do not exist as such in that realm. Hence, we are just as deterministically coerced in molinism as we are in theological determinism, only the "determiner" is a mysterious formal realm of "middle knowledge" wherein God chooses which of those counterfactuals to actualize in the created world. Ever since Plantinga's monumental work, however, the more fashionable contemporary

same variety of assaults on God's authority where God's victorious glory reigns supreme and redeems that evil for God? Surely not. Would the good of God's reflected authority be experienced profoundly without our knowing what it is like to rule over a discordant world, rebellious bodies, and fallen wills, still no.

The *imago dei* entails comparable settings for demonstrating God's authority through man's leadership, and amputations are just one means of paralleling those two roles. God rules over a rebellious created order even embracing a self-limiting form because of the Fall of man. Jesus "amputated" far more than a set of limbs when He suspended divine omnipotence to make "himself nothing,

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phrasing of the problem of evil has been the Evidential Argument from Evil (EAE) made famous by William Rowe and later by Daniel Howard-Snyder, see, William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979), 335-41; and "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, (Indiana University Press, 1996), 262-85.

taking on the form of a servant, being born in likeness as a man" (Phil 2:7).

Goodness and Governance Recapitulated

Several goods can be proposed or implied in relation to the *imago dei*. First, the gift of governance is good. It is good to be endowed with privilege and opportunity, as that endowment constitutes trust, honor, and affirmation. In this case, the gift is governance via the *imago dei*. And whatever else we know about mankind, it is widely admitted that man needs some sort of governance—minimally involving self-governance, but also allowing for family, community, local, city, state, and federal governance. Strict anarchism is not a likely or realistic candidate though it is not entirely unheard of among serious political thinkers. Some sort of governance is fitting lest the good of man's collective free-will devolves into a Hobbesian "state of nature." Moreover, if humans have governance over humans then there is peer representation

and equity is thought to be more likely when there is a "jury of our peers" or "no taxation without representation."[25] Thus it is good to have the gift of governance.

Second, it is good that God's authority be manifested to the world. The demonstration of God's authority gives cause for worship, and if God is the definitive beauty (as classical theism asserts) then it is a pleasurable good to focus one's attention, in worship, toward God. Moreover, worship of God is also good in the sense of ontological rightness—God, if he exists, would be the most important being, hence attributing worth to Him is simply correct.

Third, it is good that man understand his God, in part, by attempting to exercise God's delegated duties in

[25]No case is made here for particular governmental structures be it leftist or right wing, whether monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy. I do however commend a "representational" government as in a republic. But, in principle, there are numerous "healthy" options of governance available given different contexts.

the world. Man would seem to have some big shoes to fill. Yet that is precisely what the *imago dei* has done to man; God has commissioned man to conduct some of God's duties, but as delegated authorities on earth, reflecting God's more rightful and supreme authority. Man's exercise of dominion thus becomes a sort of representational art

Fourth, building on the previous point about "meaningfulness," bodily wholeness is not the highest value. There are such goods that even sacrificing a limb could be worthwhile. Stated another way, for amputation to function as a simple defeater for theism, it would have to be of such negative value that it defies redemption. Yet such irredeemable evil is impossible (or at least difficult) to achieve unless bodily wholeness were of the highest value (or tied for the highest value). From a biblical perspective, there are some goods worthy of a sacrificed limb. Matthew 18:8, for example says, "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better

for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire" (NASB).[26]

Fifth, like other phrasings of the problem of evil, the EAO errs for thinking, "I wouldn't have done it this way," is a strong objection. That is, man in his presumed ability for governance, says if there is a God, and God has allowed for great evil in this world up to and including unhealed amputation, then He is evil or false since "I would have done things differently." While this line of objection flies in the face of the Inscrutibility Defense, it is not entirely off target either.[27] People can discern justifying principles of action, reasoned objections, and can discern between better and worse behaviors. But this very line of

[26]Matthew 18:8 may be read as literal instruction or figurative illustration; either way, the point remains that heaven (or at least the avoidance of hell) is of such great value that sacrificing a limb could be justified.

[27]Stephen Wykstra's, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," and Robert Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," both in Daniel Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (1996).

objection implies something of what the *imago dei* doctrine predicts, namely, that people can govern vast domains. People can imagine what it would be like to govern whole planets or a universe (though, I suspect we cannot imagine it very well). What people cannot imagine, however, is everything that God knows such that our thought experiment is informed comparably to God's actual governance.

Of course we do have reason to object to amputations. But our objection to God's manner of governance either risks presuming too little of him or too much of us. God would be sovereign over the whole world, not just of the particular amputees we have in view. God would be aiming at exceedingly good ends, not just immediate, trivial or small-scale goods that people can conceive. God would know the end results of all past, present, and future acts. Given God's exceptional standing, He can still work inscrutably in transcendental and

abundantly good ways directing all creation towards supremely good ends even through evil (such as amputations).[28]

Put another way, our outrage over this chapter in the middle of the book is because we cannot see how the story ends. Were this chapter, by itself, the whole story then our outrage might be justified. But since past chapters (including miracle history—resurrection included), and present chapters (including revelational history—Bible) point to a much bigger better story than nature alone can dictate, then we have reason to believe that our present understanding and experience of amputations can play a part in greater goods by the end of the book.

Sixth, and finally, traditional theodicies and contemporary defenses help explain at least some cases of amputation. Traditional theodicies include, free-will, character formation, and punishment. Contemporary

[28]Ibid.

defenses include the natural law defense (Van Inwagen), and the inscrutability defense (Wykstra).[29] Even in cases of apparently gratuitous evil, there might be a more poignant choice, virtue, or bit of justice at work which is inscrutable to mere mortals.

Conclusion

Amputations do not defeat classical theism, but neither are they any great gift to Christian theology. God-belief is not easy. A biblical worldview is taxing and tough. Of all the strengths of a Christian worldview, accounting for amputations is not among them. Amputations can seem gratuitous and proposing that a given case is indeed redeemed in the bigger picture requires some measure of faith; but, given the *imago dei* doctrine coupled with traditional theodicies, and a spate of contemporary

[29]Peter van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, The Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," in *Evidential Argument from Evil*; Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseum Arguments."

defenses, Christian theism stands vindicated as an informed, plausible, and defensible account for evils in the world. Amputations would seem altogether irredeemable if life is just about pleasure, if meaningfulness did not matter much, and if our judgment of how to run things is broadly reliable on a cosmic scale. Pleasure, however, is merely one facet of life. Our administrative ability is quite finite. And meaningful contexts can exist such that transcendent meaning rules over and crowds out normal trivial pursuits, terrestrial expectations, and pleasure ethics. There is great redemptive meaning to life where human beings press through pain, power through loss, and overcome infirmity to reflect that extra length of God's authoritative glory to the world, the glory of the *imago dei*. Though we would never volunteer to be amputees displaying such things, they are still greater goods. There exist complex goods to where even the resurrected form of Christ kept his crucifixion scars intact.