IN DEFENCE OF MORALISING ANTI-THEODICY: A REPLY TO SNELLMAN

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I am almost entirely in agreement with the arguments of Snellman's article[1]. The only significant point of disagreement I can identify is his rejection of moral anti-theodicy on the basis of its 'moralising' about God and the created order. I agree that moral anti-theodicy often does this, but I do not see it as a sufficient reason to condemn such moralising anti-theodicy as deeply problematic. I suspect this point of difference is symptomatic of a more fundamental disagreement about the role of justification in ethics and religion. Just as Snellman would reject the demand that theism can only be acceptable with a theodicy ('theodicism'), I would reject the demand that a moral reaction can only be acceptable with a metaphysical foundation. So, in spite of this point of difference, I am very grateful for the opportunity to develop some lines of thought that did not have a place in the original survey article to which Snellman responds. I will therefore offer three responses, mainly in defence of moral anti-theodicy, in the interests of furthering the discussion: Firstly, moral anti-theodicy stands accused of 'moralising' about God and the created order, or of otherwise being question-begging in its moral condemnation. I agree that it probably is, but (for reasons I will outline) I am not sure this is a much of a failing. Secondly, it is claimed that moral anti-theodicy insufficiently dismantles the speculative metaphysics underlying the problem of evil. Again, I agree, but I am not sure that it needs to do this in order to remain a legitimate response to theodicy. Thirdly, even if the underlying metaphysics is dismantled such that we can construct a grammar of religious stories that avoids theodicism, I think a moral anti-theodicy could still have

1 Lauri Snellman, "'Anti-theodicy' and Antitheodicies", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11, no 1, 201–211. doi:10.24204/ejpr.v11i1.2579.

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a place in this new context, even if it might end up taking the form of a more traditional protest atheism.

I.

Firstly then, moral anti-theodicy stands accused of begging-the-question against theodicy by offering a moralistic judgement that is 'detached from the system of reasons that exists in the world in question [i.e., the theistic world in which a theodicy is true]'.[2] Simply put: if theism is true, and if a theodicy is correct, then the moral facts are not as the moral anti-theodicist believes them to be. There are, in fact, justificatory reasons for the permission of all evils. The moral anti-theodicist denies this. But if a theodicy is correct, the moral anti-theodicist is simply wrong. When they then denounce the morality of theodicy, they engage in a question-begging 'moralising'. I am not sure whether there is a clear consensus on what 'moralising' means in this context, but we can tentatively define it as 'an illicit introduction of moral considerations',[3] or else a 'failure to recognize what moral thought or reflection requires (and does not require) of us in the broad sense'.[4] Perhaps more importantly, moralism 'like other terms of disapproval such as "sexism", is essentially normative, and attributes some kind of mistake or error', and usually 'the mistake is one of emphasis or excess. Moralizers can be excessive about morality in some way, and thus seem to exhibit a vice, one involving lack of due proportion in the direction of extreme demandingness or strictness'.[5] To accuse moral anti-theodicy of a moralising question-begging is therefore to level two criticisms at it: Firstly, that of question-begging, and secondly, a kind of unfounded and over-reaching moral judgmentalism.

The thoughts I offer in response are intended to counter both accusations. I am not convinced that begging-the-question is a vice in the context of moral anti-theodicy, and therefore the accusation of a vicious moralism does not follow. This is because I see most (or at least some) moral-anti-theodical responses as being *necessitated* responses.[6] Due to this moral modality, ac-

2 Snellman, "'Anti-theodicy' and Antitheodicies", 205.

3 Julias Driver, "Moralism", *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2005), 137.

4 Craig Taylor, *Moralism: A Study of a Vice* (Routledge, 2014), 153.

5 Driver, "Moralism", 137.

6 I see Ivan Karamazov's to be an archetypal expression of a necessitated moral response: 'I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unassuaged indignation, *even if I am*

cusations of question-begging do not seem to me to apply to the same extent as they would normally.

My intention is only to show that a morally-motivated anti-theodicy can find the resources needed to avoid an accusation of question-begging — whether it is ultimately correct to do so is another question. I appeal here to the familiar thoughts of Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*,[7] and to a greater extent to the arguments of Raimond Gaita in *A Common Humanity*.[8] It is internal to the concept of reasonable thought that there are some beliefs held to be beyond doubt, or otherwise held to be 'unthinkable' to seriously deny. 'The reasonable man does not have certain doubts.'[9] For there to be doubting behaviour, or any kind of rational enquiry, some things must be held certain: 'If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either […] I am not more certain of the meaning of my words that I am of certain judgments.'[10] I would align these certain judgements with 'necessitated responses'. Life shows us these: 'Why do I not satisfy myself that I have two feet when I want to get up from a chair? There is no why. I simply don't. This is how I act.'[11]

I won't repeat those arguments in detail here (other than to recycle them for my purposes) — it is a broad and no doubt controversial area in epistemology — suffice to state that I agree with them and see no reason why the same could not be said of moral reasoning. In this, I fall largely in line with others who have pressed something similar to this case, including Nigel Pleasants,[12] Stefan Rummens,[13] and Benjamin De Mesel.[14] It seems to me that there are some moral judgements that are 'unthinkable' to deny, because to

not right.' Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Penguin, 2003), 320.

7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Harper & Row, 1969).

8 Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking About Love and Truth and Justice* (Routledge, 2001), in particular the chapter 'Forms of the Unthinkable'.

9 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 220.

10 *Ibid.*, § 114

11 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §148. Also: 'My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on. — I tell a friend e. g. "Take that chair over there", "Shut the door", etc. etc.' *ibid.*, § 7.

12 Nigel Pleasants, "If Killing Isn't Wrong, Then Nothing Is: A Naturalistic Defence of Basic Moral Certainty", *Ethical Perspectives* 22, no. 1 (2015).

13 Stefan Rummens, "On the Possibility of a Wittgensteinian Account of Moral Certainty", *The Philosophical Forum* 44, no. 2 (2013).

14 Benjamin De Mesel, *The Later Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy* (Springer, 2018).

deny them would undermine the practice of moral judgement, or would otherwise expose oneself to be incapable of making moral judgements.[15] Some moral judgements are necessitated responses: they are 'hinge propositions' around which moral reasoning swings. To surrender these judgements is not to change one's judgement, but to lose grip on the meaningfulness of making moral judgements. When we encounter such a moral 'hinge proposition', we find we cannot deny it, we find it to be 'unthinkable' to deny: The situation in a moral context is in fact stronger than a non-moral epistemological context, since we also find that we *should not* deny it. If we can characterise the moral-anti-theodical reaction in this way, as a necessitated response, then it seems to me that an accusation of question-begging would miss the point.

By way of illustration, let me make a moralising anti-theodical judgement, citing the varied ways I might express a necessitated response to the example (familiar to the discussion of theodicy) of the Holocaust (with the intention of using language as parallel as possible to Wittgenstein's arguments in *On Certainty* and elsewhere, and to Gaita's in *A Common Humanity*): I want to say that if I know anything, morally, I know that the Holocaust should not have been permitted, that there is no reason morally sufficient to warrant its permission. That judgement is likely to be stronger and strike me as more reasonable than any argument offered in attempt to justify it.[16] My attitude to the Holocaust is an attitude towards 'something that cannot be morally justified'; I am not of the *opinion* that the Holocaust is not morally justified.[17] It is *unthinkable*, for me, that there would be a reason to justify the permission of the Holocaust. It is not as if I infer, on the balance of probabilities, that the Holocaust was probably the kind of thing that shouldn't be justified. If I decided to seriously investigate the balance of probabilities and, after investigation, came to the conclusion that the Holocaust was in fact probably

15 'Practice in the use of the rule also shows what is a mistake in its employment.' Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 29. 'The truth of my statements is the test of my understanding of these statements. That is to say: if I make certain false statements, it becomes uncertain whether I understand them.' *ibid.*, § 80.

16 'My not having been on the moon is as sure a thing for me as any grounds I could give for it', *ibid.*, § 111.

17 '"I believe that he is not an automaton", just like that, so far makes no sense. My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: With German and English Indexes*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe (Blackwell, 1967), no. 2.

not justified by a morally sufficient reason, I would not consider that to be a paragon of reasonable investigative thought, but a parody of it (much as if I seriously investigated the existence of my feet before standing from a chair).[18] What I know of the Holocaust stands as a paradigmatic case of moral clarity: it is utterly unambiguous. It is probably constitutive of what I understand to be 'wrongness', of what I understand to be the limits of 'justification by a morally-sufficient reason'.[19] It is a judgement that characterizes the way I judge, that characterizes the nature of moral judgement.[20] Any argument that requires me to surrender my judgements in this paradigmatic case would be too morally demanding: it would require me to dismantle my entire moral understanding.[21] I would fear to change my judgement of the Holocaust.[22] It would seem to me to be a moral failing for me to even attempt to change my judgement in this case, to try to bring myself to see the 'reasonableness' of the other side of the argument, or to allow my judgement to be changed.[23]

Were someone then to come to me with a theodicy and argue that, contrary to appearances, the Holocaust was in fact a necessary component in a network of divine purposes, such that its permission is adequately justified by a morally sufficient reason, I will reject that story on the basis of its conclusion.[24] This is

18 See footnote 20.

19 'Developing an aspect of Wittgenstein's thought in On Certainty, I suggest that these regularities condition the concepts used in our reasoning, rather than providing support for it.' Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 166.

20 'My judgments themselves characterize the way I judge, characterize the nature of judgment.' Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 149.

21 'What if it seemed to turn out that what until now has seemed immune to doubt was a false assumption? Would I react as I do when a belief has proved to be false? or would it seem to knock from under my feet the ground on which I stand in making any judgements at all?' *ibid.*, § 492.

22 'I would feel like someone who suspects he is losing his mind and who is still lucid enough to feel the full terror of the realisation that he cannot trust his mind when it assures him that it is not so.' Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 162–63.

23 'The fear of thinking that perhaps there is no such thing as evil is not, as is the fear of thinking the earth might be flat, a fear that one is losing one's capacity for sound judgment. It is the moral fear of becoming the kind of person who seriously doubts the reality of evil. At stake is nothing less than one's moral being.' Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 178.

24 'If something happened (such as someone telling me something) calculated to make me doubtful of my own name, there would certainly also be something that made the grounds of these doubts themselves seem doubtful, and I could therefore decide to retain my old belief.' Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 516.

begging-the-question against theodicy, but I don't think it's a failing to do so.[25] I would do the same to any argument, however convincing, for the flatness of the Earth, for example, and I'd be right to do so.[26] I would do the same to any secular attempt to offer a justification for the Holocaust: Imagine someone attempting to argue that the Nazis had every reason to enact the 'Final Solution', that at the time it was reasonable to infer that the Jewish people, Gypsies, Slavs, homosexuals, etc., deserved it, or that it was a regrettably necessary means to the greater good of some other end, such as uniting international democratic response to fascism, etc., etc., thereby offering morally sufficient reasons for the Holocaust. Imagine their arguments are extremely well prepared and I find myself running out of counter-arguments: Should I bravely follow the argument where it leads and accept their conclusion? I would refuse to on the basis of the conclusion, and I'd consider myself right to do so.

This is clearly very dogmatic and question-begging, since I am flatly denying the possibility of being mistaken in my judgement whilst offering no external justification for my judgement.[27] It also, of course, offers no guarantee that I am correct in my judgement.[28] We know of many cautionary counter-examples: Other eras, cultures, and people will find other things unthinkable and will happily think (and do) things that I consider unthinkable,[29] so this is not the end of reflection or discussion. But in any reasonable discussion there

25 Benjamin De Mesel would take this — my judgement that the conclusion 'denies a moral certainty' — to be a necessary indicator that, for me, morality is absent, in anything but a thin sense, from the moral argument (theodicy) in question, and is therefore rightfully disregarded in any consideration of what I ought to do. For further development of this point see De Mesel, *The Later Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy*, 153–73.

26 As Raimond Gaita points out, the likelihood of me winning a rational argument with a flat-earther is low, since I have not put much preparation into my counter-arguments, as they have. I would likely lose that discussion. The point is not that I should bravely follow the argument where it leads, but 'That protagonists in a discussion should be in touch with reality is a condition of something actually being a discussion rather than a parody of one.' De Mesel, *The Later Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy*, 158.

27 'The difficulty is to realise the groundlessness of our believing.' Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 166.

28 'From its seeming to me — or to everyone — to be so, it doesn't follow that it is so. What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it.' *ibid.*, § 2; 'It would be completely misleading to say: "I believe my name is L. W." And this too is right: I cannot be making a mistake about it. But that does not mean that I am infallible about it.' *ibid.*, § 425.

29 'Cultures are partly defined and distinguished by what is unthinkable in them.' Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 181.

must always be some things that are ruled out of consideration, 'unthinkable not in the sense that no one ever thinks them, but in the sense that they are beyond argument; they are "indefensible" because any serious attempt to defend them would show one to lack the judgment necessary for the proper exercise of reason on the matters in question. Or, in the case of moral matters, because it is wicked even to contemplate them.'[30] The judgement that the Holocaust can be justified by a morally sufficient reason seems to me to be within that category. We can call that a moralising judgement, but I'm not convinced that phrase carries any pejorative weight in this context: we would happily assert that moralising judgement in any context other than when discussing theodicy and the problem of evil. One of theodicy's major failings is that it encourages us to lose sight of these otherwise-uncontroversial moral judgements.[31]

There are always, and must always be, limits to reasonable thought: that is internal to the concept of what it is to think 'reasonably'. If moral thinking is subject to reasonable appraisal (which I believe it is), then moral thinking is subject to the same requirement for reasonable limits as all reasonable thought. The morally reasonable man does not have certain doubts. We see this attitude in paradigmatic cases of anti-theodicy:

> To be 'open-minded' about certain realities, and 'more tellingly' to *insist* on retaining such a contemplative disposition, is to show oneself to be incapable of making certain exigent moral discriminations. In the worst of cases, this incapacity to acknowledge that a particular reality is mind-stopping betokens an irremissable moral blindness, in less serious occurrences it testifies to a real lack of moral imagination, to an unshakeable moral coarseness. But in *all* cases the failure to lend a voice to the cries of the innocent (and there can be few more glaring instances of this failure than the willingness to construct a divine teleology out of innocent suffering) is to have lost the capacity to tell the truth.[32]

I contend, therefore, that we should understand some moral-anti-theodical responses as being necessitated responses, as kinds of 'hinge propositions' around which reasoning about the problem of evil swings. In extreme cases, to reject certain moral judgements is to reject the practice of making moral

30 Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 181.

31 We could, again, draw on De Mesel's work here (De Mesel, *The Later Wittgenstein*) and take this to be a strong indicator that the discussion of the problem of evil, to the extent that it relies on a back-and-forth about the success or failure of theodicy, has become 'thin' and therefore powerless to give us a reason to change our minds on these morally-significant matters.

32 Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Blackwell, 1986), 84.

judgements. This is because these '…regularities condition the concepts used in our reasoning, rather than providing support for it'.[33] It is relevant that theodicy must deal with morally extreme cases (as it must deal with all cases), because we are content to moralise in morally extreme cases, just as we are content to beg-the-question in epistemologically extreme cases. Any sceptical response to the contrary is likely to be met, not with further argument, but with a 'call to seriousness'. This 'call to seriousness' is all the more serious in moral matters, because 'to be morally serious [...] is to fear to doubt the reality of evil because that fear is inseparable from understanding what evil is. [...] The fear of doubting the reality of evil is inseparable from an understanding of the very nature of evil because it is central to our understanding of the kind of seriousness that we attribute to any morality informed by a sense of evil.'[34]

II.

Secondly, it is claimed that moral anti-theodicy does not sufficiently dismantle the speculative metaphysics underlying the problem of evil. Moral anti-theodicy retains a commitment to 'theodicism' — the 'demand that theism is acceptable only if one can produce a theodicy'.[35] Again, I agree that this is correct, and that moral anti-theodicy certainly can be (and is) deployed in a context that assumes theodicism. But, again, I am not convinced that this is much of a failing; or if it is, it's a very limited failing. We are all victims of history, and the discussion of the problem of evil has taken a very clearly-defined route in the recent history of the philosophy of religion: from its origins in the 'God of the philosophers' of the modern period, to the revival of the logical problem of evil (J. L. Mackie), its perceived refutation by the Free-Will Defence (Alvin Plantinga), its evolution into the evidential problem of evil (William Rowe), and the subsequent/current responses in the form of theodicy and sceptical theism. This development had determined the rules of the game in our contemporary philosophy of religion, and it is into this context that the contemporary version of moral anti-theodicy must speak. As such, moral anti-theodicy responds to (or better: within) a version of the philoso-

33 Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 166.
34 Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 179.
35 Snellman, "'Anti-theodicy' and Antitheodicies", 201–202.

phy of religion in which an acceptance of the God of the philosophers, the arguments of natural theology, the problem of evil, and the viability of theodicy has been the overwhelming consensus for some time now. I am stating the obvious here: but dismantling this consensus, and the speculative metaphysics that grounds it, would be a much more far-reaching criticism than merely a morally-motivated response to theodicy. Moral anti-theodicy could be deployed for that greater purpose, but it need not be.

There is a direction of entailment here: It is from pre-Kantian metaphysical speculation that we derive the 'God of the philosophers'; from that we derive the problem of evil; and from that we derive theodicism, generating the need for theodicy. Following moral anti-theodicy, one certainly can collapse the chain of entailments, and *modus tollens* our way back to a rejection of pre-Kantian speculative metaphysics, but this is not the only option. One might wish simply to go back to the drawing board and find alternative ways to solve the problem of evil without resorting to those theodicies that have been shown to be morally suspect.

So whilst it is true that 'moral antitheodicy shows at most that attempts to find sufficient reasons for evils are immoral, not that searching for sufficient reasons and connecting them with God is mistaken at the outset.'[36] I ask: isn't that enough? If moral anti-theodicy manages to show that attempts to find sufficient reasons for evil (theodicy) are immoral, then I think its work is done. Moral anti-theodicy can go further and take the form of a metacritique of the philosophy of religion, but it does not need to. It can have humbler aims and simply be a response to theodicy. In doing this, I think it remains a legitimate response, and as such not going any further is not so great a failing. Moral anti-theodicy is anti-*theodicy*, after all, not anti-theodicism, or antitheism, and certainly not anti-'philosophy-of-religion-as-we-know-it'-ism.

III.

Thirdly, I would like to consider the situation if the above is rejected. Imagine we have rejected the speculative metaphysics underlying the problem of evil, and hence rejected theodicism. We no longer have a compulsion, logical or otherwise, to offer a theodicy, but we might still face other forms of the

36 Snellman, "'Anti-theodicy' and Antitheodicies", 206.

problem of evil that might call for some sort of response. Perhaps we face a religious problem of evil, struggling to maintain faith in our suffering; or perhaps we face a practical problem of evil, struggling to find a way to carry on and overcome evil and suffering when it seems so overpowering. Imagine we are successful in building grammars of religious stories that avoid theodicism yet still manage to respond to the broader forms of the problem of evil: is there still a place for moral anti-theodicy? I think so, but it would depend upon the type of new story offered.

For me, a good example here would be Andrew Gleeson's *A Frightening Love*.[37] Gleeson is an anti-theodicist, and at times obviously a moral anti-theodicist.[38] Yet he presents a positive response to the problem of evil. He believes that the religious believer can overcome the problem of evil 'existentially' by coming to see the world as an act of love. This might be impossible for the unbeliever — and that impossibility might point towards a significant difference between believers and unbelievers — but holding fast to the notion that the world is a work of love, created by a God who is love itself, allows the believer to reconcile their faith with even the most horrendous evils. This is an 'existential' stance, both for the believer and the unbeliever, and therefore to some extent transcends rational argument (once again putting us in the territory of the 'unthinkable to deny'), but it nevertheless 'solves' the problem of evil because 'the believer, in the name of love, exempts God from moral judgement'.[39]

One of Gleeson's central claims that the demands of morality can be overcome by the demands of love: A God of love can be beyond the jurisdiction of morality, because 'love, according to believers, protects God from moral

37 Andrew Gleeson, *A Frightening Love: Recasting the Problem of Evil* (Macmillan, 2012).

38 'The point is that — *pace* theodicy — we cannot, on God's behalf, *morally justify* his creation of a world with such evils on the ground of the goods. It is shouldering the goods with a burden they cannot bear by putting them in a position where they are contaminated by the evils, so that it becomes a serious question whether we now can celebrate them decently at all. In a nutshell: *the lives of children are not for sale*. These questions must be faced. The failure of so much of the theodical literature to press them adequately is too often hidden behind an impersonal pseudo-objectivity of weighing goods and evils. But the point about contamination shows that the image of an economic exchange breaks down here. If I barter my oranges for your apples the apples are unaffected and I get what I wanted: perfectly good apples. But if God or a human being barters a child's life for some general good (and even if the child shares in that good) the good is affected and we get something that we did not bargain for: a moral burden.' Gleeson, *A Frightening Love*, 6.

39 Gleeson, *A Frightening Love*, 79.

accountability, and thus from condemnation, by exerting a claim upon us as authoritative as, or even more authoritative than, morality itself'.[40] In defence of this, he appeals to the analogy of God being 'like a loving parent', and offers examples of human parents responding to the claims of 'love' over and against the claims of 'morality'. In particular, he offers the example of parents conceiving and bearing a child who they know will be handicapped. Gleeson claims that though 'morality' might condemn them for their decision, 'they are borne along by the passion of love, a sort of personal necessity akin to what philosophers have called "moral necessity". The same may be true of God's creation of the world'.[41] He reiterates this point:

> Sometimes what an impersonal morality, or a morality of compassion, will condemn, love will sanction and even demand. For example, parents who conceive and bear a child they know will be handicapped may stand condemned by morality. But morality may thus show itself to be sometimes an insular thing. The parents know something greater: the insatiable love which drives them to create. Just like such human parents, God may create the world, a world he knows must contain terrible evil, in an act of reckless love.[42]

Although slightly off-topic for this discussion, I think it's worth mentioning that only a shallow and impoverished conception of 'morality' would condemn parents for conceiving and bearing a handicapped child. Although I accept the unfortunate reality that contemporary moral philosophy finds nothing strange in the claim that we might rationally and 'morally' *condemn* parents for choosing to have handicapped children, this should indicate to us nothing more than the dire state that contemporary moral theorising is in. It ought to be obvious that there is more to the value of life than physical or mental ability. Claiming that God can be beyond the jurisdiction of a 'morality' in which parents can be condemned for having handicapped children seems to me trivially true: Even *I* am beyond the jurisdiction of *that* morality, so I have no doubt that God could be too.

The deeper point is that 'morality is not the only voice which speaks for humans, including the innocent victims of evil. There is also love'[43] and that 'the importance of love puts God's action in creating the world beyond the ju-

40 *Ibid.*, 104.
41 *Ibid.*, 34–35.
42 *Ibid.*, 35–36.
43 *Ibid.*, 35.

risdiction of morality'.[44] God so loved the world that He created it recklessly, fully in the knowledge that innocents would suffer horrendous evils. Rather than offering a theodicy, Gleeson imagines God asserting His love:

> 'I cannot justify my creating you in a world with such evil in terms of impersonal thought that compels you to accept my actions intellectually regardless of your personal, existential responses. It would be an insult to you to even try. I did it because I love you, and I can only ask you to love me in return.'[45]

This is a response to the problem of evil that does not require theodicy, does not seem to commit to the 'God of the philosophers' metaphysics, and does not seem to endorse theodicism; and yet, for Gleeson, has the power to overcome the problem nonetheless, albeit 'existentially'.

There are various ways one might disagree with Gleeson's argument; relevant for our purposes here is that some of those ways might be moral disagreements reminiscent of moral anti-theodicy. Imagine, for instance, the previous quotation being said 'in the presence of the burning children'.[46] Does it stand in any better stead than the typical statements of theodicy? I am not sure it does; but many might disagree. Alternatively, I find Gleeson's assertion that a claim of love can be more authoritative on us than morality, or that love can have the power to somehow transcend the jurisdiction of morality, to be problematic: not least because we typically appeal to moral concepts in order to differentiate between real and counterfeit forms of love. For example, I am inclined to dismiss abusive forms of 'love' as being counterfeit forms of love, for the sole fact that abusers behave so badly to the one they claim to love. My reaction is simply that if they really loved their loved one, they could not behave abusively towards them; they do behave abusively towards their loved one; therefore, they cannot really love them, whatever they might say about it. In contrast, this line of reasoning does not apply to the parents of handicapped children, because I find it quite easy to imagine them sincerely and genuinely loving their children. Moral concepts are partly constitutive

44 *Ibid.*, 85.

45 *Ibid.*, 99.

46 'No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.' Rabbi Irving Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire', in John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Holocaust: Religious & Philosophical Pmplications* (Paragon House, 1989), 315.

of my judgements in these cases, and therefore it seems to me that a claim of love cannot completely escape the jurisdiction of morality. In light of this, Gleeson's characterisation of the God of love might strike an unbeliever as being more than just 'a hard love. A frightening love':[47] It is reminiscent of an abusive love, a counterfeit form of love.

Were one to be met with such a story, one might be inclined to 'return one's entry ticket' on moral grounds. This would be a moralistic rejection of 'the story that overcomes the problem of evil', and would therefore share significant ground with a moral-anti-theodical response — I would go so far as to say that they are in all relevant respects the same response. But this would not be a response to a 'theodicy', since no theodicy is being offered, and neither would it obviously contain a commitment to theodicism. It would manifest as a more familiar and traditional form of Karamazovian protest atheism, or else anti-theism. Again, however, I would want to say that this is a sufficient achievement: the arguments of moral anti-theodicy are still doing some legitimate work — they *can* still respond to an argument such as Gleeson's — even if they do not respond to theodicy, insist on theodicism, or undermine the underlying metaphysics of the God of the philosophers.

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