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No Soft Doctrine: Royce on the Problem of Evil



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Introduction

The problem of evil arises when two statements are conjoined: (1) “If God exists, God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent,” and (2) “evil exists.” If God is omniscient, then God must know if evil exists. If God is omnipotent, then God could eliminate that evil, given the desire to do so. And finally, if God is omnibenevolent, then God must in fact desire to eliminate evil, or, at the very least, all unnecessary evils. In order for evil to exist, God would either have to not know about existent evil (which is inconsistent with omniscience), not have the power to remove it (which is inconsistent with omnipotence), or not be willing to do so (which is inconsistent with omni-benevolence). Yet, evil exists. This seems to imply that God either does not have the three traditional attributes as defined or does not exist.¹

Arguments from evil exploit the fact that, supposing God exists, God knows evil exists, could eliminate it, and should have the desire to do so, but does not. The arguments aim to prove that the existence of evil is grounds for the claim that God does not exist.² For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on moral evils and alert the reader if I reference an instance of natural evil.³

There are three traditional ways to answer the problem of evil: through a total refutation of the problem, a defense, or a theodicy.⁴ A theist putting forth a

total refutation denies that the existence of evil is grounds for the claim that God does not exist. In other words, they aim to prove that God’s existence is not at all problematic given the existence of evil. For example, they might argue that God exists by metaphysical necessity or argue that evil does not actually exist. A theist putting forth a defense, on the other hand, concedes that there are *prima facie* grounds for doubting God’s existence given the existence of evil. However, defenses only aim to prove the *possibility* that God could have justified reasons for allowing evil to exist. Due to space constraints, this paper will not discuss specific total refutations or defenses. It will focus on theodicies.

A proponent of theodicy concedes that there are *prima facie* grounds for doubting God’s existence given the existence of evil. However, they hold that any inconsistency can be reconciled by arguing that there are justified reasons why God would allow evil to exist. In section 2, I outline two forms of theodicy: free will theodicies and soul-making theodicies. I then present two problems with these theodicies. In the first place, they presuppose a conception of God that is not actually omnibenevolent, which is self-defeating for a traditional theistic answer to the problem of evil. Second, I argue that the individualized emphasis of the free will and soul-making theodicies downplays the significance of communities in the process of overcoming

1. Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed. accessed July 16, 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/evil/>, Introduction.
2. See Tooley, Section 1.2. It is possible to formulate incompatibility arguments from evil or evidential arguments from evil. An incompatibility argument is an attempt to prove that conjoining the statements “God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent” and “evil exists” amounts to a logical contradiction. An evidential formulation is an attempt to prove that the true statement, “evil exists,” makes God’s existence extremely unlikely when conjoined with the statement, “God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.” Royce’s career antedated the incompatibility/evidential distinction. As such, this paper will evaluate the traditional answers and Royce’s answer as hypotheses rather than as proofs or probability analyses.
3. See Todd Calder, “The Concept of Evil,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/concept-evil>. In the article, Calder defines natural evils as bad states of affairs which are not caused by the actions or negligence of a moral agent, using hurricanes and toothaches as examples. Moral evils are bad states of affairs which are caused by the actions or negligence of a moral agent, such as stealing or declining to inform someone of imminent danger. The “broad” understanding—encompassing both natural and moral evils—is typically used in the arguments from evil and responses to them.
4. Tooley, “The Problem of Evil”, Section 4.

evil. In section 3, I present Royce's answer to the problem of evil as found in *The Sources of Religious Insight* and *The Problem of Christianity*. Afterward, I argue that Royce's answer addresses the deficiencies in these theodicies. Royce's answer to the problem of evil is better than the aforementioned theodicies for two reasons: (1) it does not presuppose the problematic conception of God that the theodicies do, and (2) it adequately emphasizes the role of community in the process of overcoming evil.

The Argument From Evil and Traditional Responses

Recall that arguments from evil exploit the apparent inconsistency that arises when supposing the coexistence of God (as traditionally defined) and evil. The arguments cite the existence of evil as grounds for the claim that God does not exist. However, the existence of evil supports that claim only if two implicit claims are true. First, that there are bad states of affairs which make it *prima facie* unreasonable to believe in God's existence. Second, that there are no justified reasons why God would allow the existence of evil.⁵ Theodicies accept the first claim and reject the second. They all share the presupposition that a world with evil can be better than a world without evil, so long as that world also contains some specific valued good.

Soul-making theodicies presume that human spiritual development culminating in the achievement of a spiritual ideal ordained by God is supremely valuable. God created human beings for the expressed purpose of attaining that ideal and earning the right to dwell with God.⁶ However, spiritual development comes at a price. People must endure evil in order to acquire the character traits necessary to develop according to God's plan. Since God created a world where people can develop through their struggles with evil and (at least potentially) achieve the spiritual ideal, God remains morally perfect. With this understanding, the existence of God is consistent with the

existence of evil. Now, we move to free will theodicies.

Free will theodicies presume that libertarian free will—when it is used to worship God and when in accordance with God's moral dictates—is supremely valuable. God created people with free will so that they could worship and act morally of their own accord. Though people misuse their free will and act immorally, the great value of its proper use more than justifies the existence of evil. It follows that God must have created people with free will in order to create a morally perfect world and that the existence of God is not inconsistent with the existence of evil. It will be beneficial to consider a hypothetical instance of evil in order to see how the theodicies function to answer the problem of evil and then to highlight the deficiencies.⁷

Tammy arrives home after working late one night. The house is dark, and her family does not seem to be home. The eerie silence is broken by a phone call. The caller identifies himself as a police officer investigating a fatal two-car accident. One driver, it appears, was Tammy's husband. There were two bodies in the back seat. Tammy knows immediately that the two bodies are those of her children.

The officer informs her that the other driver, Matthew, is alive and was rushed to the hospital. It is likely that Matthew was driving under the influence of alcohol. For months, Tammy struggles just to survive. She is consumed with pain over her loss and with anger at the man who took her family from her. Finally, Matthew is well enough to stand trial. He is sentenced to 12 years in prison. Going through the process of the trial only makes Tammy's pain worse, and she finds no peace after the sentencing.

Eventually, one of Tammy's friends offers to take her to church. Tammy has never considered religious belief rational, and even married a nonbeliever in order to maintain a thoroughly secular household. In desperation and knowing

that nothing else has helped her, Tammy reluctantly agrees to go. After the service, Tammy speaks with the pastor about her case. The pastor sympathizes and tells Tammy of Christ's atonement for sin and God's unimaginable forgiveness. Despite initial skepticism, Tammy takes the lesson to heart and works to forgive the man who killed her family.

After much prayer and spiritual guidance, Tammy is ready to go to the prison and openly forgive Matthew. Tammy finds Matthew a broken man. He has fallen into self-hatred so deeply that he feels even prison is too good for him. He expects to get lambasted by Tammy for what he has done, and even welcomes the idea. Tammy, however, offers him her forgiveness. She tells Matthew of God's forgiveness which set her free from hatred and hopes that Matthew will also find his way to God. Tammy meets with Matthew once a month to read Bible verses and pray, until he is released and devotes his life to serving God.

A theist interpreting this scenario by way of a soul-making theodicy would evaluate Tammy's state after dealing with the accident and look for signs of spiritual development. The accident and all its attendant evils provided the impetus for Tammy to strive to become more forgiving, compassionate, and peaceful. Tammy learned of God's forgiveness of sin and eventually decided to model herself after that example and forgive Matthew. In this way, she developed spiritually and became more like the ideal person she was created to be, thus getting closer to achieving her purpose.

An obvious objection to this scenario is that not all the evils in this case were beneficial for the purpose of soul-making. For example, shouldn't we consider whether Tammy's husband and children developed morally and spiritually given the events of the scenario? Tammy's children died horrifically in a car accident and don't seem to have had a chance to develop any godly character traits from that. Further, Tammy's husband was not

5. *Ibid.*, Section 4.

6. René Van Woudenberg, "Chapter 12: A Brief History of Theodicy," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, ed. Justin P. McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Somerset, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated 2013), 177.

7. The reader should note that, while this scenario makes use of specifically Christian terminology, the pertinent features of the case are also applicable to soul-making theodicies and free will theodicies from the Islamic or Judaic perspective.

8. See, for example, David C. Cramer, "John Hick," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: ISSN 2161-0002, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/hick>, Section 3A.

a theist. If evil exists to make people into spiritual beings worthy of communion with God, it fails to meet that end if people die without believing in God.

To this, proponents of soul-making theodicies could argue that spiritual development does not cease at death.⁸ People may continue to become more god-like after death—either by reincarnation or transfer to another realm of existence. In this way, Tammy's husband and children could still have opportunities to attain the spiritual ideal set out for them by God. We will now move to a free will interpretation of this scenario.

Recall that theists value libertarian free will because it is a prerequisite for freely loving and obeying God. A theist interpreting this case under the free will theodicy would evaluate Tammy's actions in response to the evils she faced in order to see how her life improved by making the right choices. Tammy chose to set aside her skepticism and seek spiritual guidance. Then, she extended the love and forgiveness that she received from her newfound faith to Matthew. Further, she chose to help Matthew along his spiritual journey by meeting with him once a month. The loss that Tammy suffered provided the opportunity for her to strive toward her highest purpose—a life freely devoted to the service of God.

One could object that Tammy would not have had to suffer her loss if God had created a world without free agents. If God had created righteous automatons instead of the occasionally evil individuals that truly exist, Matthew would never have driven drunk and killed Tammy's family. However, this possibility exchanges the alleviation of suffering for the possibility of morally meaningful action. Agents who are determined to perform good actions are not as valuable as ones that freely do so. Without the capacity to choose evil humans could not be responsible for all the good that they do, thus lowering their value in the eyes of God.

The reader has surely noted a

common theme between these two theodicies. On both views, God is responsible for the existence of unnecessary evils. In the case of soul-making theodicies, God created the world as it is such that people could develop virtuous traits (such as mercy, compassion, and love) by overcoming evils, but some of these evils are unnecessary for this purpose. In the case of free will theodicies, God created human beings with free will because it is necessary for a morally good and valuable world, though it often leads to unnecessary evil and suffering. Let us return to Tammy's case to make the point explicit.

With regard to the soul-making account, God is responsible for the suffering required by the developmental process as it exists now. It may very well be that Tammy grew spiritually by undergoing the trials that she did. But if that is so, it is only because God designed the world in such a way that suffering was necessary for her growth. All other things being equal, a world where people do not have to suffer to acquire godly character traits is better than one in which they must. Being omnipotent, God could have just as easily designed a soul-making process that did not involve the experience of suffering—sparing Tammy the loss of her family—but chose not to do so. Now, we will consider the free will account.

If someone had watched Matthew stumble out of the bar, fumble with his keys, and proceed to drive away clearly intoxicated, that person would be held accountable for not intervening if he were able to do so. Of course, an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God is perfectly able to intervene whenever and wherever that God desires. So, even if the value of free will is granted, God could ensure that cases of innocent suffering such as this did not happen. A mere gust of wind could have set Matthew's vehicle on a course that did not intersect with Tammy's husband and children, which would be well within God's ability to arrange. Matthew's poor decision-making

need not have caused suffering in anyone's life but his own. A parenting analogy is sometimes used to characterize the God/human relationship, in part because of the inequalities implied but also due to God's supposed unconditional love for human beings. However, it should be clear from the preceding discussion that the parenting analogy is critically flawed.

A parent who takes the training wheels off his child's bicycle when the child has had some practice riding is acting out of love. In an imperfect world, it is necessary to challenge people in order for them to develop perseverance and responsibility. On the other hand, if that parent had removed the training wheels and allowed the child to ride in traffic that would not be an expression of love. Pushing the child into a busy intersection to test his reflexes and pain tolerance would be maniacal.⁹ The theodicies propose that God tests the innocent by letting them suffer at the hands of the guilty, and purifies their souls through pain. Those are not expressions of omnibenevolence. Because of this, neither a free will theodicy nor a soul-making theodicy can rescue the traditional conception of God from the problem of evil.

Moreover, the theodicies are inadequate because they frame overcoming evil as an individual achievement rather than a communal one.¹⁰ For example, in soul-making theodicies, an individual overcomes evil by acquiring the necessary godly character traits and striving to be the person God wants her to be. In free will theodicies, an individual overcomes evil by resisting temptation and acting in accordance with God's will. Salvation is meted out to those who meet God's spiritual standards on an individual basis. The effects that godly dispositions and actions have on others are secondary to their status as individual achievements.

To be clear, neither theodicy takes a *radically* individualistic view where evil is overcome without regard for, or

9. It must also be noted that, in this analogy, the human parent is not indirectly responsible for the existence of bicycles and motor vehicles, nor does he write the laws of physics that make their engagements tragic.

10. Of course, the foundation for the individualized emphasis in the theodicies is the doctrine of the soul. It is far beyond the scope of this paper to offer a full argument towards adopting an alternative model of the self against traditional doctrines of the soul. Rather, in this section I will point out that we can give a conceptually richer account of the role that evil plays in human life by employing a communal framework for interpreting instances of evil, which follows from the assumption of a relational model of the self.

at the expense of, others. Soul-making theodicies, for instance, value mercy as a godly character trait. This implies an interpersonal dimension to overcoming evil because a person can only be merciful to another person. Rather, these theodicies are inadequate because they do not take into account the *fundamentally* relational nature of the individuals in question.

On a communal understanding, instances of evil primarily serve to estrange people from one another. People overcome evil in much the same way that they do on the individualized understanding: They acquire character traits such as compassion, benevolence, and temperance. The difference is that, on the communal view, those dispositions and actions are primarily valuable because they serve to bring people together into a community, not only because they are individual achievements. Let us turn to Tammy's case and its theodicy-inspired readings one last time in order to compare this communal understanding against the individualized one.

The theodicy readings posit a stable core to Tammy that remained fundamentally unchanged by the loss of her family. She had the same soul before and after the loss of her family; otherwise, it would not be correct to say that *Tammy* developed spiritually or that *Tammy* was responsible for making the good choices that she did after the accident. On the communal reading, when Matthew drove drunk and killed Tammy's husband and children, he not only severed Tammy's relationships with her family but also destroyed a major part of her identity.

Tammy did not develop spiritually or act morally in a vacuum. She was a mother, wife, friend, and eventually a member of a church. In the wake

of disaster, people need psychological, emotional, and spiritual support from others, not ample personal fortitude. Tammy endured her hardships by relying on the relationship she had with her friend and forming a relationship with the pastor of the church. Eventually, she was able to overcome her hatred, forgive Matthew, and help him along his own journey to God. She overcame evil by establishing beneficial relations with others, which maintained her spiritual strength and gave her new opportunities to act in a god-like fashion.

The case is not fully explained by either theodicy reading because they both miss the cooperative element at work in it. A network of actors worked to bring about the reconciliation. That is not to say that Tammy bore no responsibility for her actions. After all, they would not have come about without her. It is simply to say that the experience of evil and its overcoming is a communal one as much as it is an individual one. An answer to the problem of evil that omits that fact does so arbitrarily and to its own detriment. In summary, the traditional answers to the problem of evil are inadequate. They imply the existence of a God which does not escape the problem of evil and they unduly omit the communal aspect of the process of overcoming evil. To prefigure the discussion of the next section, Josiah Royce's answer to the problem of evil does not suffer from these deficiencies.

Royce's Answer to the Problem of Evil

Before I discuss Royce's answer to the problem of evil, it will be beneficial to briefly explain how he frames the issue. The reader should keep in mind that Royce explicitly rejects the three-omni conception of God that is presupposed by the traditional theodicies.¹¹ We will discuss

Royce's conception of God toward the end of this section, after the foundation of Royce's views on evil has been laid. Royce understands evil in the typical sense, but with a pragmatic twist. "Evil" describes any bad state of affair which serves to undermine the purposes of a rational agent.¹²

While Royce agrees with traditional monotheists that people exist in a fallen state, fall short of an ideal life, and need a savior to achieve that life,¹³ people are not evil by nature. They perform evil actions because they are morally detached individuals.¹⁴ If left unrecognized and unattended, this detachment leads to a state called "social blindness,"¹⁵ which is to be irresponsive to the needs of others and too proud in one's own strivings to see the value in conflicting strivings.¹⁶ In order to find the cure for the affliction of social blindness, let us consider the origin of the "morally detached individual."

People are morally individuated in three ways: by the distinctness of their experience, the outward inaccessibility of their thoughts and intentions, and by the presumption that "deeds and their doers stand in one-one correspondence,"¹⁷ which is to say the presumption that collective *action* is merely the sum of individual *actions*. Royce argues that this idea is of recent vintage and is not supported by experience in daily life.¹⁸ In Royce's view, a community is a superhuman being that is composed by, but is not reducible to, its members and whose actions are more than the sum of its individuals' actions.¹⁹ A community acts in the world through its members, has a past, and will have a future. Members are united in the "spirit" of their community and overcome their social separation by taking up shared values and purposes. A community need not

11. Jacquelyn Ann K. Kegley, *Josiah Royce in Focus*, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2008), 80.

12. Josiah Royce, *The Sources of Religious Insight*, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 216.

13. *Ibid.*, 28-29.

14. Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 194.

15. *Ibid.*, 378.

16. Kegley, *Josiah Royce in Focus*, 93.

17. Royce, *Problem of Christianity*, 238.

18. *Ibid.*, 240.

19. Royce, *Problem of Christianity*, 123.

20. See Chapter 2 of Kegley's *Josiah Royce in Focus* for a thorough explication of Royce's views on the self.

21. Royce, *Problem of Christianity*, 269. See also: Frank Oppenheim, *Royce's Mature Philosophy of Religion*, (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1987), 142. "Higher life" here is meant in two senses. First, in the sense that devotion enriches a person's life, and, second, in the sense that the person's life becomes more attuned to the divine life.

be heroic to bring its members together; however, a youth soccer league illustrates the idea nicely.

Imagine that, some years ago, a group of parents decided that the local neighborhood children should have more opportunities to play and get to know each other. The parents pitched in to buy a vacant field and soccer equipment and started holding games every weekend. The parents form a community by acting together for the sake of a shared purpose. Each member takes the past actions of the league as events in his or her own past, and the future actions of the league into his or her own future. For example, Bill and Sarah both remember painting the lines on the field before the very first game, and look forward to the day that the league can afford a scoreboard. The sum of all those shared and anticipated experiences—and the meanings those events hold for the members—constitute the “self” of the community.²⁰ Yet, not every community has the same peaceful existence as the soccer league we have been discussing. Often, the purposes of a community are subverted by (or existentially opposed to) instances of evil, and members must thwart that evil. Royce calls people’s practical devotion to a higher communal life—including struggling together against evil—“loyalty,”²¹ and it is to that concept that we turn now.

Recall that an instance of evil is any state of affairs that undermines the purposes of rational agent. Under this category, we would do well to include pain, disease, and pestilence. Finite beings can only survive within a very narrow range of acceptable conditions and are severely limited in their abilities to maintain those conditions. Because human beings are so limited in their individual experience and knowledge of the world, they form communities to

survive. But, as a matter of course, these communities create and follow moral codes that vary widely. The practices of one community are often considered evil by another. In order to avoid arbitrariness in the discussion of evil, we need a regulative principle that is logically prior to the moral code of any one community, but at the same time does not invalidate those moral codes.

That principle is this: recognize “the spiritual unity of all the world of reasonable beings”²² as the true cause of loyalty. Then, seek to actualize it through the particular, and necessarily contingent, causes that make up one’s communal life. It is necessary and honorable to devote oneself to one’s community. However, communities that are rooted in hating and destroying other communities are not objects of genuine loyalty. A community that exists to divide people from one another does not further the true cause of loyalty, which is divine in nature. Communal loyalty, then, is more than a principle of morality, so long as it is genuine. For Royce, it is a religious disposition which serves a dual purpose: establishing individuals and establishing communities.²³

A community demands the unique contributions of talented individuals.²⁴ A person cannot properly serve a community’s cause without establishing herself as a unique individual, because she acquires knowledge and skills in the process.²⁵ I invite the reader to contrast people working on an assembly line with a group of medical researchers working to produce a malaria vaccine. The first social arrangement is designed to eliminate individuality through standardization, making the members more or less interchangeable. The second is designed to stimulate the creative problem-solving capacities of the members, who are experts. Far from being a loss

of individuality, true community is the guarantor of it.

However, we have so far been treating evil as something that simply should not exist. Yet, Royce’s keenest insight into the experience of evil is perhaps that this conceit is blatantly false. That seems counterintuitive. After all, curing 100% of malaria cases is necessarily better than curing 99% of malaria cases (assuming, of course, that eliminating the remainder did not involve doing anything terribly imprudent). Still, there are experiences of evil that no one would wish to remove from their lives Royce defines those experiences as *sorrows*.²⁶

Whether they occur through conscious separation or accidental death, the evils that cause the most psychological, emotional, and spiritual damage are the losses of loved ones. Supposing that an unfaithful spouse or a friend-turned-enemy can be forgiven, their actions cannot be forgotten. Even so, that grief is not something we would want to be rid of entirely. One might wish to numb oneself to the pain if it is unbearable, but not to the sensitivity that causes the pain. Spiritual strength is acquired by recognizing this sensitivity through the grief and using it to deepen relations with others.²⁷ The result of that struggle is sorrow.

In order to recognize the strength that sorrows offer, it is necessary to take a step back from the pain of grief and recognize why it exists. A severed tie between intimately connected people is the worst imaginable pain. This, obviously, implies the capacity to be intimately connected with someone, which could only be present in profoundly social beings. Sorrow’s unsettling prevalence presents a religious insight. Spiritual strength is not won by merely avoiding possible suffering because, in this world, everyone will have sorrows. Neither one’s world

22. Royce, *Sources of Religious Insight*, 205. Emphasis removed from the original.

23. *Ibid.*, 357.

24. *Ibid.*, 264.

25. Royce, *Sources of Religious Insight*, 197.

26. *Ibid.*, 239.

27. *Ibid.*, 252.

28. *Ibid.*, 253.

29. Royce, *Problem of Christianity*, 180.

30. *Ibid.* 204.

31. *Ibid.* 180.

nor one's fellows are perfect. Spiritual strength is won by developing the patience and courage to face a future full of meaningful relations without bitterness and resentment.

With this in mind, the next step is to endure the hardship. Finally, it is necessary to draw upon the insight of sorrow and reinvest oneself in social reality. One must deepen relationships or form new ones while remaining aware that sorrow in the future is guaranteed. New and renewed loyalty to meaningful causes are gifts that can only be won through suffering.²⁸ Of course, the loyalty of finite beings has its limits.

A member's betrayal of a community is an especially painful sorrow and it is often fatal for the community. The losses incurred by sorrows are permanent because the deeds cannot be undone. Further, any love that the members can extend to the traitor, or the one who betrays the community, will be scarred by the memory of their action. However, the aftermath of a betrayal is fertile ground for the creative power of communal action. Members who are willing to bear the sorrow and work to reestablish their community bring about goods that would have been impossible had the betrayal not taken place. This is how members manifest the spirit of their community, which guides the process of atonement.²⁹

In the *Problem of Christianity*, Royce illustrates his idea of atonement through an interpretation of the Biblical story of Joseph.³⁰ Joseph's brothers were jealous of the preferential treatment he received from their father and sold Joseph into slavery. Years later, during a time of great famine, Joseph's brothers travelled to Egypt (where Joseph had become Pharaoh's trusted advisor) to buy supplies. Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and sent them back to their father with ample provisions. In Royce's view, Joseph providing for his family was an act of atonement.

There are three central elements to Roycean acts of atonement. The first is

that the act is performed by some person other than the traitor. The second is that the act would be impossible without the specific betrayal that it atones for. The third element is that the act of atonement makes the world better than it was before the treason.³¹ In this case, Joseph could not have helped his brothers if he were not sold as a slave. Joseph chose to see through his grief, endure it, and make it part of a process of reconciliation. Coincidence may have brought them together spatially, but only Joseph's actions could have reunited the family spiritually. Now that the foundation of Royce's views has been laid, we can make the divine thread running through the discussion explicit.

Recall that, for Royce, a community is a superhuman being. As such, communities can be afflicted by a kind of social blindness like the one which we discussed at the beginning of the section. When members set out to do things on behalf of their community, they are expressing love for one another and for that being that unites them.³² However, the love of a community can itself become a stumbling block on the path towards creating more inclusive communities. The horrors that malevolent communities have inflicted upon the world throughout history need not be regaled here. Suffice to say that people are in constant danger of allowing the love they have for their community to become obsessive and exclusionary.³³ This happens when they mistake their finite, fallible community for the highest good. In Royce's view there is an *actual* highest good. That highest good is the Spirit of the Universal Community, which functions in Royce's religion of loyalty like the God of monotheism functions in those religions.

The Spirit is the divine being that calls upon individuals to conquer evil by exercising their loyal devotion to communities, including through atoning deeds. People are receptive to the will of

the Spirit and learn to feel the difference between communal love and the evil of hatred.³⁴ The social sensitivity that allows people to look beyond their narrow self-interest and band together into finite communities is the first hint of the ideal that is the Universal Community. Members have a duty to stay vigilant against encroaching blindness and ensure that their finite communities remain inclusive, uplifting, and faithful to the Spirit of the Universal Community.

Individuals and communities are engaged in the temporal, yet endless task of overcoming evil. The task is temporal because it takes place within the processes of the world, as the Spirit overcomes evil step by step through the triumphs of its members. The task is endless because, while individuals can work towards actualizing the ideal of the Universal Community, they will necessarily fail. So long as there are finite beings, there will be conflict and evil. The claim that every instance of evil will be met with its fitting act of atonement cannot be proven. Rather, it is asserted by all those who act as if it were true and strive to bring lasting peace to a hurting world.³⁵

Unlike the traditional conception of God, the Spirit of the Universal Community does not create the world but expresses itself through the existing processes of the world.³⁶ This means that the Spirit cannot conceivably bear responsibility for the existence of evil. Further, while the traditional conception of God allows evil to exist to suit its own salvific tastes, the entire aim of the Spirit is to overcome evil by bringing finite beings together in community.

This leads us straight away to the individualistic emphasis of the traditional theodicies, which I argue is their second deficiency. Royce's answer to the problem of evil stresses the interconnectedness of individuals and the fact that reconciling evil is a communal process. People depend on one another for the strength and means to persevere against evil, so it is

32. Ibid. 265.

33. Kegley, Josiah Royce in Focus, 93.

34. Oppenheim, Royce's Mature Philosophy of Religion, 142.

35. Royce, Problem of Christianity, 186.

36. See Kegley, Josiah Royce in Focus, 157-8. For a brief summary of Royce's views on the monotheistic doctrine of creation.

only fitting that they should overcome evil together as well. In conclusion, Royce's conception of God does not fall prey to the problem of evil, and he offers a communal model for the process of overcoming evil. For these reasons, the answer to the problem of evil that Josiah Royce proposes in his later writings is better than the traditional theodicies we have been discussing.

Conclusion

In this paper, I introduced the problem of evil and two traditional answers to that problem: soul-making theodicies and free will theodicies. After outlining the theodicies, I used them to interpret a hypothetical scenario. Using that scenario and evaluating how proponents of soul-making theodicies and free will theodicies would interpret it, I argued that the theodicies failed to answer the problem of evil adequately for two reasons. Firstly, they presuppose a conception of God that is not omnibenevolent, which is self-defeating for a traditionally theistic theodicy. Secondly, they omit the communal aspect of the process of overcoming evil. Then, I explicated the answer to the problem of evil as found in Josiah Royce's later writings, *The Sources of Religious Insight* and *The Problem of Christianity*. I argued that Josiah Royce's answer is superior to the answers given by traditional theodicies because it does not presuppose a problematic traditional conception of God. Also, it adequately emphasizes the communal aspect of the process of overcoming evil.

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