The "Whence" of Evil and How the Demiurge Can Alleviate Our Suffering

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Abstract: Mid-twentieth century witnessed a renewal of the interest in the problem of evil, presented by Mackie et al. in the form of the logical argument from evil. However, this argument was proven ineffective in securing victory over theism. A more successful strategy was devised by Rowe and Draper—the so-called evidential argument from evil. I believe that the current responses to it fail to defend God. In this paper, I try to face the evidential argument by embracing a triple strategy, which involves an alternative theology. First, a shift of focus regarding suffering from the prevalent anthropocentrism to the perspective of soteriological teleology is proposed. Second, I present a theodicy in line with Plato's approach in the *Timaeus*, as well as with some aspects of the theodicy in the *Vedānta-sūtra* II.1.32–36. Third, I argue that, if the previous two steps contribute towards a plausible answer to the problem of evil, the modified concept of the deity and the associated cosmogonical account should be brought close to the picture of Plato's demiurge and his act of creation. If it is to provide a successful defense of theism against the problem of evil, that price should not be considered too dear.

Keywords: problem of evil; theodicy; Plato; demiurge; reincarnation; karma

1. Introduction

The problem of evil (PoE) may seem to have acquired almost an aura of triviality, on account of the ease with which it is summoned whenever the theistic worldview comes under attack. Yet, its gravity and importance are evident from the fact that it has been occupying the attention of numerous philosophers and theologians over the centuries, and that it continues to do so nowadays.

The problem itself is, actually, multi-faceted, and manifests its different forms in accordance with the various ways an individual, or a class of persons, perceives the presence of evil or badness, as well as in accordance with the severity of the affliction. Thus, one could distinguish between (a) practical PoE, which pertains to the very issue of keeping one's physical and moral integrity in a world overflowing with violence and treachery; (b) existential problem of "whether and how a life laced with suffering and punctuated by death can have any positive meaning" (Adams and Adams 1990, p. 1); (c) religious PoE, which makes pious persons question their beliefs upon witnessing (or experiencing) the seemingly undeserved suffering of the innocent and which confronts a theologian or a priest who is prompted either to reconcile its presence with the accepted doctrines, or to justify the ways of God to his congregation; (d) philosophical PoE, which is of a purely theoretical nature and arises in the mind of a philosopher or a theologian, who attempts to demonstrate, relying primarily on reason and logic, that the existence of evil either precludes or is compatible with the existence of God. Furthermore, a person directly afflicted by instances of horrendous evil will most probably take a different standpoint on any of the aspects of PoE, as compared with a person somehow spared from harsh experiences.

Now, it is only the last variety of PoE that, as already implicitly indicated, gives rise to the atheological argument from evil, which is generally taken to be twofold: the logical argument from

evil and the evidential argument from evil. As it is well known, the former is a deductive argument aiming at certainty, i.e., at proving that the conjunction of the proposition "God (of classical theism)[1] exists" and the obviously veracious proposition that "there is evil in this world" leads to a logical contradiction. The latter, on the other hand, is an inductive argument, which seeks to demonstrate that the fact of evil makes God's nonexistence very probable. It would be worthwhile at this point to note that the philosophers usually operate with a rather broad sense of the word "evil", which basically incorporates any and all occurrences of badness that befall sentient beings. These are, in the recent debates, usually divided into two broad categories, those of moral and natural evil, although the traditional taxonomy acknowledges yet another type, namely the metaphysical evil.[2]

A variant of the logical argument from evil has been circulated since Antiquity: as reported by Lactantius in his *De ira Dei*, the credit for its invention goes to Epicurus.[3] However, it was John Mackie's (1955) formulation and his emphasis on the argument's potentially devastating consequences for theism that really drew the attention of theistic and atheistic thinkers alike, but also indirectly instigated some serious developments in the fields of philosophy of religion, ethics, modal metaphysics, etc. The logical argument from evil quickly found other supporters and was subjected to further elaborations (Aiken 1957/58; Mackie 1982; McCloskey 1960). However, despite its logical validity and prima facie credibility, it was proven ineffective in securing victory over theism, mainly on account of its empty form and too ambitious an agenda. Since the logical argument aims to demonstrate that the coexistence of evil and God is logically impossible, all a defender of theism has to do is to present a story, a case, or a reason whereby God may be accommodated within the picture of a world infested with evil, without going into much detail, or even without insisting on the story's high degree of plausibility.[4]

A much more challenging attempt to censure theism on account of the fact of suffering is the evidential argument from evil. Brought to prominence by Rowe (1979), and further improved by him (Rowe 1984, 1986, 1996), Draper (1989) and Tooley (2012), it portrays a richer and better nuanced strategy, which relies on adumbrating cases of horrendous evil, on inductive reasoning and the probabilistic calculus. I believe that the soul-making theodicy of Hick (2010), the defenses provided by, e.g., Adams (1999) and Stump (2010),[5] as well as the skeptical theism of Van Inwagen (2006) and Wykstra (1984, 1996)[6] fail to relieve the pressure and justify the ways of God in the face of horrendous human and animal suffering. Much has been written in support of and against the evidential argument from evil (e.g., Howard-Snyder 1996; Trakakis 2007), and here it would be both impracticable and pointless to engage seriously with the issue. Instead, I shall only mention in passing three points that, as it seems, remain to haunt the aforementioned responses. First, none of them offers any satisfactory explanation of the inequalities of origin, health, wealth, status, or even the intellect that we humans encounter at birth, and which, to a significant degree, condition our later material and spiritual development. Second, the question of why an omnibenevolent deity would create a nervous system so susceptible to pain, when it is easily conceivable that the oft-suggested objectives of rectification or sanctification could be achieved with less agony, is hardly addressed. Third, I dare say that the very

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[1]　That is, the omnibenevolent, omniscient and omnipotent deity who creates the world ex nihilo. By the end of this paper it should become clear that the concept I presently adhere to is somewhat different. In a word, with the term "God", I denote the supreme omnibenevolent and omniscient being, the fountainhead of consciousness and bliss, who generates the world by ordering the primordial stuff of creation and infuses it with life and goodness, as far as possible.

[2]　This tripartite division of evil and its nomenclature was probably introduced by Leibniz, despite his claims of rootedness in tradition. In the *Theodicy*, where it first appears, Leibniz is not very verbal about the concepts, and all he gives is the following: "Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. Metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, physical evil in suffering, and moral evil in sin" (Leibniz 2007, p. 39). Through the centuries, the metaphysical aspect of the problem has somehow slipped out of the picture, but that might not have been the best maneuver.

[3]　See (Fletcher 1871, p. 28). Hume's famous rendering in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Hume 2007, p. 74), is but a simplified version of the same argument.

[4]　This remains so besides some recent efforts to revive the argument, the latest one being (Oppy 2017).

[5]　It is worth mentioning that Stump's is an especially thorough and commendable attempt to produce a cogent defense, carried out in a dialectical way and attentive to even minor details.

[6]　For an overview and apology of the skeptical theism responses, see (Perrine and Wykstra 2017).

quest for a morally sufficient reason that would justify God in allowing a gang rape of a nine-year old girl who dies in the process is not only inhumane, but even impious.[7]

Faced with the force of the evidential argument from evil, a theist could decide to pursue one of the following options: to simply ignore it, taking PoE in general as a non-threatening challenge to the theistic belief; to cling to some of the already existing theodicies, or propose a novel one but along the same or similar lines; to embrace some form of alternative theology that allows for the modification or redefinition of some of God's essential attributes, and which, accordingly, enables its proponent to offer a purportedly satisfying answer to PoE; to give up on theism, considering that there is, after all, no way to conjure up good reasons for the presence of the obviously gratuitous, unjustifiable instances of evil in a universe allegedly created ex nihilo by an omnipotent and omnibenevolent deity.

In this paper, I shall try to tread the third path, but in a somewhat unconventional manner. First, a shift of focus with regard to suffering from the presently prevalent anthropocentrism (or zoocentrism) to the view of soteriological teleology will be proposed. Second, I shall try to present a theodicean story pursuant to Plato's ground-breaking work in the *Timaeus*, as well as to some aspects of Śaṅkara's, Rāmānuja's, and Baladeva's theodicy, developed in their commentaries to the *Vedānta-sūtra* II.1.32–36. Third, I shall argue that, if the previous two steps contribute towards a plausible answer to PoE, the modified concept of the deity and the associated cosmogonical account should be brought close to the picture of Plato's demiurge and his act of creation.

2. The Creation and Its Probable Purpose

The suffering of the innocent presents such a grave challenge to the theistic belief, that one philosopher recently wrote: "[n]ot only do I not think there is an effective counter response [to PoE, but] I don't [even] want to be argued out of my position" (Ruse 2017, p. 252). As an illustration, he outlines the destinies suffered by Anne Frank and Sophie Scholl during the Second World War (which are far from the most gruesome deaths and afflictions one can imagine or that, unfortunately, indeed happen on daily basis). Even in this stylized form, the argument from evil, probably the most powerful reason against the existence of God, makes our author conclude that to believe in God is to uphold immoral convictions.[8]

This could be a legitimate move. However, perhaps not so, unless a certain precondition is fulfilled, namely unless it is taken for granted that the deity, were he to "deserve" the appellations 'omnipotent' and 'omnibenevolent', could have created only a single type of a world—one that would perfectly cater to the needs and desires of sentient beings, and in which they would only prosper, both materially and spiritually. It seems that critics of theism often expect God to have created a counterpart of the Jehovah's Witnesses' paradise. Of course, no sane person would protest the painless existence of peaceful cohabitation, compassion and joy, which is, besides, enriched with ample aids to acquiring knowledge. However, it is more than just conceivable that, had indeed God created the world, he might have had in mind a purpose different from the utilitarian demand for "greatest happiness for greatest numbers".[9]

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[7]　This is the old, poignant Dostoyevsky-style objection, which has an especially strong effect on our affective cognition. Similar considerations have compelled some theists to shrink from the attempts to exculpate God in the face of evils, and qualify them as fruitless, or even morally dubious. These are the so-called anti-theodicists. See, e.g., (Roth 2004) and (Trakakis 2013, 2017), while for the opposite view, i.e., the one promoting the positive potential of, and the need for, theodicy, see (Hick 2010, pp. 6–11; Swinburne 1988).

[8]　Strawson (2012) is even more explicit: "[G]enuine belief in [the Christian] God, however rare, is profoundly immoral: it shows contempt for the reality of human suffering, or indeed any intense suffering".

[9]　To reiterate, this seems to be the assumption rooted in the minds of many contemporary advocates of the argument for evil. It is interesting to note that Hume in his *Dialogues* (Hume 2007, p. 72) presents a simple deduction meant to prove this assumption false. Thus, from the presupposed infinity of divine power and the fact that no man or animal is truly happy, Hume concludes that God does not will their happiness; from the infinity of divine wisdom and industry, and the fact that "nature tends not to human or animal felicity", he concludes that nature does not have that purpose. Hume's alleged reason for applying this argument is to demonstrate that God's morality is incomparable and incompatible with that of humans, while he in fact covertly intends to induce skeptical, or even anti-theistic, understanding in the minds of his readers.

God could have, instead, envisioned the world as an educational and correctional facility, meant to bestow in due course—possibly through the means of remedial punishment—the ultimate benefit upon its inhabitants.[10] Obviously, an objector can challenge this stance by asking why there has to exist anything correctable in the first place, i.e., why souls have to be faulty and in need of rectification; but that one is, I reckon, answerable in a relatively satisfactory way by the application of two strategies: (a) attributing to them the faculty of free will, or/and coming up with some kind of "original fall" story; (b) resorting to the Principle of Plenitude (Lovejoy 1936; Hick 2010, pp. 70–82), which demands that, in order for the world to be considered as complete and perfect as possible, every potentiality of existence must be actualized. Be that as it may, my intention in this paper is not to go into details, but instead simply to present an outline of a possible composite, non-traditional answer to PoE. That means that many of the presuppositions, and even some of the positive claims, must presently remain undefended.[11]

Yet another possible doubt, namely why would God at all be interested in straightening up the inhabitants of his creation, is fairly easy to answer—that is a matter of his benevolence and desire to make everything as good as possible. It thus turns out that God's final purpose in creating and maintaining the universe is to correct and educate all souls and prepare them for their final, ultimate beatification. Given that this supposition is not utterly unreasonable, perhaps one's main criteria concerning the evaluation of the world's goodness should not be the quantity or quality of pleasure and pain sentient beings are subjected to; these experiences are, after all, often to a certain degree dependent upon subjective considerations. Why not, instead, suppose that the "success" of the creation could be assessed against a different scale? Could not the level of disenchantment with the desired and hoped for amiability of the material nature be the proper measuring rod? If this were the case, then suffering would find its place within the grand picture as an important impetus toward disassociation from the world, even as a stepping stone on the path to salvation. Accordingly, the cosmos' *telos* would be the *soteria* of all embodied souls.

One of the problems with this proposal is, obviously, that we do not observe many human beings who are goaded by suffering into achieving a state of beatitude or direct, unmediated grasp of some higher truth. Nevertheless, all eschatological traditions do report such incidents: consider, for example, the disillusionment story of the young Siddhārtha Gautama. Besides, it is also easy to detect the common feeling of detachment and defeat of meaning people usually share upon suffering catastrophes or losses of near and dear ones (known by the Hindus as *śmaśāna-vairāgya*, i.e., "renunciation at the burning ground"), etc.[12]

This probable account may, at first glance, seem as not much more than a plain reiteration of the main features of Hick's well-known Irenaean soul-making approach. Of course, there is a strong affinity between the two,[13] but also a substantial difference, which I hope will become clear in the following sections. To express it briefly at this juncture, unlike the Christian theodicists, I do not believe

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[10] It is worth pointing out that the notion of purposeful, purificatory suffering was a key component of the Islamic theodicies as well, most notably of those of Rūmī and al-Ghazālī (see Rouzati 2018, pp. 4–13). The essential information on the problem of evil as confronted by the Islamic thinkers can be gathered from the concise and useful discussions in (Mobini 2013; Winter 2017).

[11] As it is clearly impossible, within the scope of a single paper, to make a case for most of the complex issues that will be touched upon here, including the existence of free will, plausibility of transmigration theory, compatibility of monotheism with dualist/pluralist ontology—to mention just a few.

[12] It would not be an exaggeration to say that the mental state of resignation, or even despair, (bearing within itself the seed of philosophical/spiritual inquiry) forms a significant part of our daily life and culture. Thus, people often find that in comparison to the inevitability of disease and death, much of what they crave or aim for is overrated. These feelings have been amply expressed in literature (e.g., Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Sartre's *Age of Reason, Nausea*, Beckett's *Proust, Waiting for Godot),* but also in popular culture—it will suffice to point out Pink Floyd's masterpiece album "The Wall", and the recent grim description of the American day-to-day life in a black comedy movie with a telling title: "I don't feel at home in this world anymore".

[13] As they both share resemblances with all theodicies that focus on the eschaton. For an overview of those and further references, see (Peterson 2008).

that God allows evil at all, or that he utilizes it to produce some greater good: instead evil inescapably follows from the nature of the stuff of creation and the independent will of the souls.

In summary, it is not counterintuitive to presume that God's guiding principle in creating the world has not been to actualize a state of maximum pleasure for all, or even to facilitate any kind of human well-being, but instead to arrange the conditions in accordance with a final cause, i.e., to establish a redemptive atmosphere that would guide the innately imperfect rational agents towards the path of emancipation.[14] The cogency of this supposition rises with the acknowledgement of the thesis that in our essence we are neither Catalonians nor Spaniards, neither Catholics nor Orthodox, not even humans simpliciter; what we actually are is a separate, immortal soul, a foreigner in this foreign land of matter.[15]

3. Ancient Theodicies for Modern Times

The Platonic theodicy, some aspects of which will be briefly introduced here, is actually many-faceted, and contains the seeds of most of the strategies that were later made famous, especially by Plotinus and St. Augustine.[16] In this paper I shall consider only two solutions developed in the *Timaeus*, both of them inseparable from the figure of Plato's creator-god—the demiurge—and also easily relatable to the moral and physical aspect of the problem of evil respectively.

First comes the very widely known free-will theodicy, in its rudimentary form originally advanced by Plato, and later used as a staple maneuver in defense of God's omnibenevolence, ever since the times of the early Stoics.[17] This strategy relies on the notion of the rational agents' moral responsibility for their freely made choices, and has its source in the last book of Plato's *Republic*. There, within the context of a mythical exposition of the laws and principles behind the otherworldly and earthly punishments and rewards, appears a succinct and philosophically very consequential proclamation: *aitia helomenou· theos anaitios*—"the responsibility is upon the one who chooses; God is guiltless" (*Rep.* 617e5). The same idea is further corroborated in the *Timaeus*, in the passage that contains the demiurge's declaration of the "laws of destiny" (*nomoi heimarmenoi*, *Tim.* 41e3), in the course of which a rather elaborate theodicean story is presented.

There is no need presently to delve into the intricacies of the Timaean myth; it will suffice to mention its relevant conclusion, as well as to underline two crucial ingredients of this Platonic free-will theodicy, or, as it may be tagged, solution from personal responsibility. The most important upshot of the story are Plato's solemn verdicts that decisively assert the ultimate responsibility of the moral agent, as well as the freedom from blame of God and any other possible subordinate cosmic administrators or forces that may be involved in sustaining the universal order. As stated in the *Timaeus*, one of the demiurge's main purposes in instructing those soon-to-be-incarnated souls was to help them understand that "he would be held blameless for the future evil of each of them" (*tēs epeita eiē kakias hekastōn anaitios*, 42d3-4). Furthermore, his emissaries—the "younger gods", entrusted with the duty to create the living entities' material bodies and to manage the affairs of the universe—are commanded to take care of and guide the mortal being in the finest ways possible "save in so far as it may become a cause of evils to itself" (*hoti mē kakōn auto heautōi gignoito aition*, 42e3–4), lest they interfere with its free will and thus sponsor a world of automata.

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[14] This does not imply the necessity of self-denial on the part of the individual of the kind criticized by Stump in (2010, pp. 420–32); it rather requires acceptance of the unavoidable and awareness that happiness in separation from the divine is, ultimately, impossible.

[15] That is to say that for the purposes of this paper, I take the self to be an individuated transmigrating soul, fundamentally disassociated from the various identities it assumes during its myriads of embodiments.

[16] Interestingly enough, not everybody would agree that Plato is even interested in PoE, or that he proposes a theodicy at all; however, since I tried to demonstrate the opposite elsewhere (Ilievski 2016), that question will not be an object of my interest here.

[17] See Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus, lines 17 and 21–25.

The relevant aspects of Plato's psychopaideic myth's content can be conceptualized into two closely knitted elements, i.e., the aforementioned "crucial ingredients", which stand out as defining features of the solution from personal responsibility. The first one is the important notion of equal beginning for all. What this means is that if the concept of cosmic justice were to have meaning, then every soul should be offered the equivalent opportunity for learning and advancement, an indispensable aspect of which is the right to a uniform starting position. Plato, in the *Timaeus*, accomplishes this task through the image of an initial incarnation, taking place somewhere close to the beginning of time, at which every soul is being embodied in the same kind of physical vessel, namely that of a male human (*Tim.* 41e). From that point on, the unfolding of the future events and the subsequent elevation or degradation is ultimately dependent on the choices that the now human beings make in their first incarnation. This step excludes the possibility of any bias on the side of the Creator, as well as the charges of him being behind the disparity of status, rank, position and conditions we find ourselves in.[18] To make myself absolutely clear, it is not that I advocate the facticity of Plato's first-male-embodiment story; it does, however, seem to me indispensable to propose some kind of equal starting point account (albeit relative to the particular thinker's world view), if the notions of personal responsibility and divine impartiality are to be taken seriously. Thus, we have the Biblical story of Adam's and Eve's mutiny, the Alawite account of the original fall (Peters 2003, p. 321), Origen's concept of free-willed intellects that influence their future births and circumstances by the attitudes develop during their disembodied state (*De principii* II.9, esp. II.9.6-8), maybe Plotinus' theory of archetypes of individuals (*Enn.* V.7), etc.

Second, this whole construct, of course, presupposes the theory of transmigration—known in the Greek world before Plato via the alleged Orphic influences, and via the speculations of some of the Pre-Socratics[19]—but also the eminently Indian concept of karma, which in its essence betrays a rather simple, and for that particular religious and philosophical mind-set almost intuitively veridical idea: the given conditions at every particular stage of existence attached to any individual—subhuman, superhuman or human[20]—are directly determined by the nature of that individual's physical deeds and mental acts in past lives.[21] And this is one legitimate way—as inconsiderate and susceptible to misuse by the powerful as it may seem—to explain even horrendous evil suffered by the innocent.[22]

Now, when the nice pair of reincarnation and karma has been introduced, it may be the right time to give a very sketchy account of the Vedāntic answer to PoE evoked in the Introduction,[23] if only to compare and evaluate it against the related Platonic one. This answer appears in the *Vedānta-sūtra* II.1.32–36, within the context of a cosmogonical inquiry, which is itself significant for the attempts to justify God in the face of evil. The section opens with the (opponent's) claim that if God were the maker of the universe, he would have had some purpose, and consequently desires—which is incompatible

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[18] The idea is plain: a person born in a fishing village in the Philippines and a descendant of a British university professor clearly do not have equal chances of earning a teaching position at the University College London during their lifetime. However, the assumption advanced by Plato is that there was a phase when they were complete equals; the fact that their respective futures have developed differently from that point on is ultimately upon them alone and has nothing to do with God. Plato's demiurge is quite explicit on this.

[19] Most notably Pythagoras (see, e.g., Xenophanes' B7 DK, Porphyry's VP 19), and Empedocles (B117 DK, B127 DK). Kahn (2001, pp. 18–19) claims, not without some supportive argumentation, that Pythagoras most probably borrowed this doctrine from the Indians. For an older and more adamant statement to the same effect, see (Keith 1909, pp. 569–70). For orphism and reincarnation, see (Bremmer 2002, pp. 23–24). For the beginnings of the rebirth theory in India, see (Dasgupta 1975, pp. 53–57).

[20] This statement is applicable to the Indian concept of karma, where the gods are also subjected to karmic laws. In cannot be transposed to Plato, whose gods have fixed sempiternal positions (see Tim. 41a–b).

[21] As postulated already in the Upaniṣads (e.g., *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.* IV.4.5–6, *Kaṭha Up.* II.2.7, *Praśna Up.* III.7), in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (e.g., 2.51, 3.9), but also, by and large, in Plato: (e.g., *Gorg.* 523a–b, *Phd.* 113d–114c, *Rep.* 615a–c, *Leg.* 904a–e). For a concise exposition of the karma doctrine, see (Chatterjee and Datta 1984, pp. 15–17; Dasgupta 1975, pp. 71–74; Hiriyanna 1995, pp. 46–50). The cause of present suffering is usually located in previous lives, because it takes some time for the karma seeds to fructify.

[22] Thus, also Plotinus: "But in the past he inflicted [upon others] those things he presently suffers" (*alla ēn pote tauta poiēsas, ha nyn esti paschōn, Enn.* III.2.13.13).

[23] An overview of the *Vedānta* theodicy, focused primarily on Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, is given in (Bilimoria 2013, pp. 288–93).

with divine nature. Therefore, the world was not created by God. The *sūtra-kāra* refutes this objection by resorting to the theory of *līlā*, or purposeless pastime,[24] which aims at both confirming divine agency and safeguarding it against the charge of intentionality, which, to the Indian mind, implied changeability, deficiency and ultimately engrossment in the mundane.

This device is a controversial one, to say the least, for—in view of the most common objection—the plays or games we are acquainted with usually do have a purpose, and that one is, to add insult to injury, pleasure or joy. Consequently, the *līlā* strategy prima facie implicates God even more severely, and had therefore received not less than three disparate interpretations by the *Vedānta* scholastics. In a word, Śaṅkara chose to explain away the notion of creation as play and, while retaining the phrasing, stealthily replace it with the doctrine of generation as expression of Brahman's intrinsic nature, likened to the spontaneous and disinterested process of inhalation and exhalation—in itself an old Vedic simile. Rāmānuja tried to justify the *līlā* theory in a more direct manner, arguing that the act of creation is comparable to a play because it is manifested only for the sake of divine motiveless sport, while the world and the events therein are nothing but accessories required for the sport to take place. Finally, Baladeva, following Madhva, interprets the *līlā* of creation as a spontaneous outburst of divine exuberance, impelled by Brahman's essentially blissful nature. Creation is now explained as an expression of suprasensuous joy, somewhat comparable to the human activity of disinterested play, when the latter results from an inner state of happiness, like the impulsive dancing of an elated person.[25] This seems to be the only interpretation that does justice to the *sūtra-kāra*'s intention, and I am inclined to understand it as bearing affinity with Plotinus' doctrine of the overflow of the One's superabundance as the ultimate cause of generation (*Enn.* V.2.1).

While with *sūtras* 32 and 33, so to say, the scene has been set, the next three *sūtras* are dedicated to a more direct grappling with the issue of suffering. Put in a nutshell, this approach—in answer to the charges of partiality and cruelty that may be attributed to God on account of the observed inequalities among beings and the distress they are often subjected to—advocates the view that all these are due to the sprouting of the seeds of karma, planted by the very moral agents who experience disparity and anguish (*sūtra* 34). God does indeed provide the necessary conditions for those seeds to develop—by creating the material environment where the beings' internal strife and the mutual conflicts take place—but he is not to be blamed for that, just like the beneficent rain is not responsible for the growth of poisonous and harmful plants. In the words of a 20th century commentator on Rāmānuja: "The Lord is only the operative cause in the creation of beings; the main cause is the[ir] past karma ... " (Vireswarananda and Addevananda 1995, p. 238).[26] This is to say that God disposes the free agents in their respective positions with strict regard to their karma, for which they are solely and fully responsible.

Now, the Platonic postulation of actual traceability of personal responsibility to its original, earliest, primary "user" has the advantage of escaping the greatest blemish that tarnishes the Vedāntic approach: the threat of infinite regress. All its proponents, without any exception, rely on the concept of beginningless karma and *saṁsāra*. So much so that, as evidenced by *sūtras* 35 and 36, the beginninglessness postulate is actually used as an answer to the putative objection that the observable differences of status and fortune among entities betray an unfair God, who must had instituted these inequalities in them before the cycle of rebirth was initiated. Not so, says the author of the *Vedānta-sūtra*, because there is no initial stage: the cycle is eternal. It is interesting to see how Indian philosophers and some contemporary scholars believed and believe that the very concept of beginningless (*anādi*)

24　See (Herman 1971, pp. 265–70). For an associated conception of the world as a play of a god, see Heraclitus B 52 DK, with Nietzsche's interpretation in (Nietzsche 1962, pp. 57–68).

25　For a thorough elaboration of these three approaches to the *līlā* theory, see (Uskokov forthcoming, ch. III).

26　For the same conclusion in Śaṅkara's and Baladeva's commentaries, see (Gambhirananda 1965, pp. 360–65), (Vasu 1979, p. 268). See also (Herman 1971, pp. 271–73).

karma is, so to say, self-insulated from the regressus ad infinitum problem.[27] The question of following anyone's karma all the way back to the original free volitional act "is really inadmissible, for it takes for granted that there was a time when the self was without any disposition whatsoever" (Hiriyanna 1995, p. 47).[28] However, it does seem to me that unless the initial misuse of free will is somehow indicated, the attempt to identify individual moral responsibility will remain elusive, precisely on account of this endless regress of life-stages at which blame (or praise) is attributable to that particular individual in question. A little illustration may be in place here. The present states of affairs of two women—one affluent, the other poor—may be said to be directly dependent on their good or bad actions of the previous life. Those, however, in turn depend on the actions performed in the life before that, and so on. If this backward trend continues ad infinitum, one could conclude that, after all, the true origin of the current developments cannot be traced out, that the causal chain is devoid of its first link, and that therefore the persons in question cannot unproblematically be considered responsible for their fate. The proponents of the beginningless karma view would retort that this very concept implies that any inquiry into a supposed original stage is absurd and would take that as a sufficient answer to the challenge. This, however, despite all cognitive efforts and good faith invested, seems to me more like a variant of petitio principii, than like a satisfying answer.

To put it differently, the Vedāntic solution employs the karma-reincarnation doctrine to explain the differences among living beings, as well as the individual and collective suffering. As for the question of how the "original sin" transpired and who is to blame, it is answered with the denial that there had been such an event at all; and since no one is guilty of it, God is not guilty either. The quest for the ultimate cause of the present suffering is pronounced as futile as the attempt to arrest eternity and determine its beginning in time. However, in this way, moral responsibility cannot be firmly attached to any individual, because of the indeterminableness of the causal chain. Plato, on the other hand, also accepts karma and reincarnation—for without them, it is impossible to make sense of the obvious and consequential disadvantages some sentient beings undergo, of infant deaths, of animal suffering, etc. Furthermore, he relieves God of the burden of primary responsibility more successfully, by pointing out the individual's initial misuse of independence. This I hold to be a strategy equally unverifiable, but still more cogent than the former one.

So much for the first major ingredient of the Platonic solution from personal responsibility and the associated Vedāntic take on the problem of evil. Passing on to the second element, one could discern that it answers the unspoken question of the availability of knowledge regarding the soul's position and imminent future, as well as of the possible insight into the universe's etiology and its moral constitution and organization. Tagging along the mythical narrative adopted on account of the subject's inscrutability, Plato in the *Timaeus* 41d–42d presents a picture of souls mounted on chariots and promenaded by the demiurge across the heavens, and later also directly cautioned by him of all the trials and challenges they will be obligated to fight through in their incarnate state. As a result of this acquaintance with the nomological structure of the universe, as well as of the moral precepts so magnanimously put forward, a few righteous souls may succeed in reviving their original blessed state straightaway, already in the first incarnation, and thus be exempted from loitering in the cycle of *saṁsāra*.

Similarly as in the first-male-incarnation case, here as well one could try to pierce through the thick clouds of the myth and propose that some kind of information on the right and wrong course of action is indeed accessible to every fully developed, inquisitive human being, and so in various forms. Sometimes this information may come through revealed scriptures or various spiritual teachings and philosophies, sometimes with the help of the noble vision that all instances of distress and happiness the sentient beings are subjected to are in fact punishments and rewards brought about by their own

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27　See, e.g., Baladeva's position in (Vasu 1979, pp. 268–70; O'Flaherty 1976, pp. 17–19).
28　Herman (1976, pp. 263–64) recognizes the regress, but considers it non-vicious.

actions, meant to bring moral and spiritual growth.[29] Sometimes it may arise by way of reasoned observation of nature's regularities that gives rise to the a posteriori arguments for intelligent causation and teleological operation of the cosmos, which might have been in vogue since the beginnings of philosophical reflection.[30] Finally, it may come by way of the rare, contested—but never actually disproven—human ability to acquire direct, intuitive knowledge.[31]

Plato's second take on the problem of evil that will be addressed here invokes the presence of a substance, or an entity, cohabitating with God since eternity, and can therefore be labeled as the coeval entity solution. Its origin is to be found in the *Timaeus*. Indeed, the Timaean ontology recognizes, besides intelligible beings, an eternal, uncreated "material" plenum called space (*chōra*, 52a), or receptacle (*hypodochē*, 49a), upon which the present world of becoming rests. This receptacle is the backdrop on which the Forms cast their reflections, and it originally exists in a state of chaos. It is in this entity that, after the initial ordering effectuated by the demiurge, the peculiar Platonic secondary cause of the creation, named necessity (*anankē*, 48a), arises. Also known as "the wandering cause" (*planōmenēaitia*, 48a), *anankē* is utilized by the intelligent cause—which is the demiurge, or the principle of order and reason—for the purpose of generating the sensible world of our every-day experience.

As a matter of fact, the primary impetus that prompts God to proceed with the creation is the vision of the state of disorder and unruliness in which he finds the receptacle in unison with his natural proclivity, to make things as similar to himself as possible, i.e., as excellent as possible (*Tim.* 29e–30b). Now, as Plato has it in the *Timaeus*, despite demiurge's good will to the opposite, some traces of the original chaotic state were retained even after the primordial forces of disarray had been curbed, and these were also transferred to the final product, i.e., to the sensible realm as we presently know it (*Tim.* 48a, 53b, 56c). That is to say that the original imperfection of the stuff of creation could not be eradicated, and so it entered the fabric of the world.

Although, of course, a concord on this issue among scholars has never been reached, still quite a few of them—both in ancient times and today—have believed that the root cause of all evil, for Plato, is to be found exactly in the disorder of the preexisting building-blocks of the universe.[32] God had to make use of them—since Reason alone cannot create the world—and he did that in the best way possible. However, the inferiority of the secondary cause and its recalcitrance to God's purpose, made decay, disturbance, deprivation—in fact all evils independent from human will—a necessary concomitance to the very existence of the world, which, despite all its shortcomings, still represents a great good, a beautiful masterpiece of the omnibenevolent artisan.

Understood along these lines, evil ceases to be something allowed, or in any way approved by God: in fact, it turns into an unwanted, but unavoidable byproduct of the creation's materiality, something that remains, in a sense, beyond God's power to counteract.[33] Thus, the coeval entity solution may be described as a peculiar, undoubtedly highly non-traditional, answer to PoE, which however not only fits well within the Platonic system, but also potentially presents a very elegant means to abrogate the notion of God's involvement in the extraneous evils that befall sentient beings.

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[29] See (Hiriyanna 1995, p. 49). In particular the difficult circumstances, which may be understood as giving us a strong impetus for moral and spiritual betterment. In fact, the appeal to this kind of approach to the challenging circumstances was one of the main theodicean strategies of the stoics (see, e.g., Seneca's *De Providentia* I.6, II.1–4).

[30] The first recorded appearances of the ex operibus dei reasoning are probably in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* I.4.2–7, and Plato's *Philebus* 29d–e and *Laws* 886a2–4.

[31] For Plotinus, non-discursive, intuitive knowledge represented the crown of philosophical training and practice (see *Enn.* I.3); it also empowered the Indian saints, both the heterodox—like Buddha and Mahāvīra—and the Vedic seers, to influence so profoundly their followers and humanity in general.

[32] Different versions of this theory were held by Aristotle, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Plotinus, later on by Leibniz, and in the 20th century by (Vlastos 1939), to a degree by (Cornford 1997, pp. 206–8; Greene 1948, p. 331), and others.

[33] Indeed, Plato's demiurge wills to make everything excellent, and leave nothing bad, as far as that is possible (*kata dynamin*, Tim. 30a, etc.). This oft-repeated phrase makes it clear that there are fits the demiurge cannot accomplish. That may, or may not make him non-omnipotent, as it will be argued in the next section.

It may also provide a reply to the questions: how can an imperfect creation nevertheless be considered good, and how can a perfect Creator give rise to such a flawed, defective universe?

4. The Demiurge's World and Its Ontology

As the preceding section perhaps made it obvious, this style of theodicy requires a theological background rather different from the one spontaneously assumed by those brought up in, or acquainted with, the Judeo-Christian tradition. Of course, such swerve from the revealed religions' established dogmas is anything but novelty; the most iconic endeavors at redefining theism would probably be those of Whitehead's and Hartshorne's as conveyed in their process philosophies,[34] of the Jewish post-Holocaust religious thinkers (e.g., Braiterman 1998; Kushner 1981), and, to a degree, of the proponents of the so-called open theism (see Pinnock et al. 1994). As for the content of the suggestion I am going to spell out concisely in what follows, it is actually very much rooted in the tradition attached to a particular string of interpretation of Plato's cosmogonic theory and theology. It has been initiated in the *Timaeus*, and preserved in Antiquity through the construals of Aristotle, Plutarch and others, but also remains alive in the 20th and 21st century, in the works of scholars like Sorabji (1983) and Gregory (2007)—to mention just a couple of prominent names. These thinkers have not in any way upheld a unified vision of Plato's cosmology or theology, but have indeed shared the view that Plato posited an actual beginning of the creation, which implies existence of a pre-cosmic state of the universe; in a word, they all have been inclined to accept the literal interpretation of Plato's creation story in the *Timaeus*.

So, the proposal I would like to submit here follows in the footsteps of such interpretations, inasmuch as it consents with the literal reading of the *Timaeus*, i.e., accepts as factual the pre-existing material cause of the creation, which Plato's demiurge utilizes in performing his task. The idea is fairly simple. It boils down to extrapolating this concept from the field of Platonic studies to theology in general, and suggesting that a possible way to preserve the theistic worldview in the face of horrendous evil would be to acknowledge dualist ontology.[35] This implies ascribing ontic status to, and accommodating within one's Weltanschauung, a principle distinct from God, not inimical or obstructive in any positive way, but instead inherently imperfect and incomplete, a principle of materiality which essentially stands in need of bettering.[36] It is to be conceived as separate from God, but also uncreated by him, a certain given which shares with God the attributes of causelessness and eternity, although not those of sentience, knowledge, bliss, etc.[37] Alternatively, such theo-cosmology need not necessarily accept that the universe has a beginning: whether the precedence of God and the material principle to the phenomenal world is factual or only logical, makes little difference to the purpose of explaining evil, I reckon. Nevertheless, my inclination is to assume that the history of the universe has been unfolding starting with a concrete act of creation,[38] both because this idea fits more

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[34]　Most notably in (Whitehead 1978, *Process and Reality*), and (Hartshorne and Reese 2000, *Philosophers Speak of God*).

[35]　This may also be seen as one version of what Brightman calls "finite theism". His historical overview of this tendency in theism, starting with Plato and ending with Whitehead and other 20th century thinkers, is given in (Brightman 1940, pp. 286–301). An important recent work on alternative concepts of God is (Buckareff and Nagasawa 2016), with Chapters 5, 6, and 7 being particularly relevant to the topic of this paper.

[36]　It may not be superfluous to emphasize that I do not subscribe to any kind of Ditheism of the Manichean type. Matter is neither God's rival, nor—being non-sentient—a rebellious entity in the real sense of the word; it remains infinitely inferior and eternally subordinated to him. Therefore, my suggestion should better be tagged as "soft dualism", instead of "dualism" simpliciter.

[37]　That soft ontological dualism or pluralism is not incompatible with strict monotheism was shown by those monotheistic thinkers who accommodated within their ontologies entities uncreated and coeternal with God, though subordinated to him, like, e.g., al-Rāzī (five principles: God, soul, matter, time, space; see (Badawi 1963, pp. 440–45)); Baladeva (five principles: God, soul, matter, time, karma; see (Vasu 1979, pp. 2–3, 269)); Mādhvācārya (three principles: God, soul, matter; see (Sharma 1997)).

[38]　This need not mean that the world's creation occurs in time, because it can be argued that the latter emerges jointly with the world. God's mode of existence and activity is non-durational eternity, which our inescapably temporal parlance fails to grasp and describe. The question of the transition from ungenerated to generated state and the associated problem of the period of divine inactivity that precedes the latter thus become redundant.

neatly with the theodicean strategies spelled out in the previous section, and because it can be, to a degree, attuned with the prevalent scientific theory of the universe's origin.

Now, the most undesirable consequence of such dualistic ontology is the alleged imposition of limit on God's omnipotence feature; this, of course, is what a traditional theist would like to avoid at any cost. As a matter of fact, philosophers from both ends of the theist-atheist spectrum hold that, should any intrusion into God's classical attributes be allowed, the problem of evil will cease to be applicable to such a deity.[39] With this way of eradicating the problem, however, much of God's worshipfulness is taken to be abolished as well, and one ends up with, as the saying goes, throwing the baby out with the bathwater. This is a grave objection indeed, and the primary task of an advocate of the soft dualist thesis seems to be to persuade the opponent that theism of this kind is worth upholding. The high exigency of such a step notwithstanding, all I can do in that regard, within the narrow confines of the present paper, is to offer a very rough draft of two strategies applicable against the omnipotence objection.

First, the claim that a non-omnipotent deity is not susceptible to PoE is by no means a universally shared intuition. Were it so, Plotinus' elaborate theodicy—to give just a single example from Antiquity—would have been off the mark and redundant; but that is certainly not an uncontroversial assumption. Besides, even nowadays theodicy is obviously possible for theists who veer off from the traditional understanding of God;[40] furthermore, the latter is not as easy to pin down as it may seem at first sight. This is so because quite a few qualities and powers of the deity, as conceived by the great monotheistic religions, remain a subject of debate.[41] It can be argued that in a metaphysical system which embraces a non-omnipotent God, the empty-formed logical argument from evil would not arise, but I believe that the more threatening one, i.e., the evidential argument, remains pertinent. Because even a merely very powerful entity could prevent some of the horrendous evils the embodied beings suffer; it could, for instance, extinguish or divert a devastating forest fire. That is all well and good, someone may object, but why would a theist want to embrace altered ontology if it does not even solve PoE? A very brief answer to this worry would be that although soft dualism alone gives no satisfactory answer to PoE, it does mitigate the latter to such a degree that, when augmented by the other two strategies presented here, actually plays a vital role in finding a solution to PoE. It is my conviction that the appeals to personal responsibility, etc., will not do without the reduced omnipotence hypothesis.

Second, and more importantly, the allegation that such a God would not be worthy of adoration is equally questionable. For one thing, it is hard to stipulate what kind of Divinity is worshipable and what is not. Furthermore, non-traditional theists cannot be prohibited from directing their devotion towards God as conceived by them, especially since various types of worship apart from the standard liturgies are possible, like the purely intellectual one.[42]

Another way to confront the opponent of the soft dualist thesis is to argue that God's omnipotence is, strictly speaking, not endangered by the introduction of ontology akin to the one presented in Plato's *Timaeus*. As evident, this move would aim at circumambulating the unwanted emendation of divine properties, by reevaluating the concept of omnipotence instead. Although I cannot presently delve into the intricacies of this highly complex issue, it must be pointed out that the very notion of divine

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[39] "[T]he problem of evil ... arises only for a religion which insists that the object of its worship is at once perfectly good and unlimitedly powerful" (Hick 2010, p. 4). See also (Mackie 1955, p. 200; Van Woudenberg 2013, p. 177).

[40] Such is, e.g., the process theodicy. For accounts and defenses of process theodicy, see (Ford 1992; Keller 2013).

[41] For a brief clarification of this position, see (Keller 2013, p. 344).

[42] See *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.70. In addition, Trakakis' assumption (2007, p. 341) that—in order to serve as a useful tool in counteracting the problem of evil—the limitation of God's power should go all the way to excluding everything that is empirically impossible, need not be always acceptable. I see no problem in postulating a divinity, analogous to the demiurge, who is capable of performing supernatural acts (creating the world would certainly be one of those), but still "powerless" both to prevent the Titanic from sinking (on account of the passengers' karma), and to alter the natural law that terrestrial animals cannot survive long underwater.

omnipotence still remains somewhat elusive.[43] It is also not preposterous to state that, as far as PoE is concerned, some accounts of omnipotence actually aggravate the difficulties. Such is, for example, the one according to which an omnipotent being is capable of doing whatever it wills, and its will cannot be impeded by any extrinsic factor.[44] The omnipotence conundrum gives rise to multiple theological puzzles, but it will suffice here to exemplify them with a single question, relevant to this paper's subject matter: Would an omnipotent being, liable to no extrinsic impediments whatsoever, desire and strive to establish a morally perfect universe? I believe that the standard reply to this is as follows. Of course God desires and is capable of instituting the best state of affairs, but he nevertheless willingly desists from preventing the souls' wicked acts, because by sacrificing the possible pre-arranged—and hence sterile—moral order, he intends to attain a greater good. The greater good in question manifests itself in the form of a world of beings endowed with free will, potentially capable of independent moral progress, and eventually, of developing a loving relationship with God. However, although in this way God's omnipotence seems retained, the divine attribute of omnibenevolence is put into jeopardy. For, it is highly questionable whether an all-good being would allow, for example, Campanella's tortures by the Inquisition, on the pretext of the very unlikely possibility that those traumas would somehow redeem and sanctify his soul, or on account of the even slimmer chances that his victimizers would, in that one lifetime that is given to them, of their own accord, turn away from those evil ways and develop a love of God.

On the other hand, one could argue that by adopting the above Platonic-type dualist ontology and the appurtenant theodicean strategies, not only a more satisfying answer to PoE could be provided, but that also both God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence may be left intact. For, if the material cause is indeed coeval with God and uncreated, then its existence is a matter of metaphysical necessity, while at the same time even an almighty being cannot do what is metaphysically impossible. Therefore, it does not seem unreasonable to claim that the soft dualist ontology does not abrogate God's omnipotence, although he cannot neither actualize the creative act without pre-existing matter,[45] nor just leave it lying there all disordered and ugly; the former does not fall within the scope of the metaphysically possible, while the latter clashes with God's goodness and natural tendency to make things better than they are.[46] He thus produces a world as good as possible, i.e., good to the degree to which the preexisting material with its inherent forces of recalcitrance is liable to refinement and improvement, and to the degree to which the free moral agents are willing to cooperate with him.[47]

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[43] For the intriguing claim that a satisfactory account of omnipotence is reached upon positing an omnipotent being who is not necessitated to preserve his omnipotence omnitemporally, see (Swinburne 1973); for additional difficulties with omnipotence, see (Sobel 2004, pp. 345–68); for a brief overview of the classical accounts—from Origen to Ockham—thorough analysis of some influential recent definitions, and a sophisticated novel input, see (Leftow 2009).

[44] See (Leftow 2009, p. 169).

[45] This understanding follows in the wake of an ancient thesis, conveniently summed up in the *ex nihil nihilo fit* maxim. For philosophical arguments in favor of eternity of matter and against the *creatio ex nihilo* concept advanced by al-Rāzī, see (Badawi 1963, p. 444).

[46] One may also follow a different course and try both to preserve omnipotence and avoid dualism, by arguing that God's being could include materiality as a fundamental, but not chosen part of the All. Omnipotence would then mean that to be able to do anything metaphysically possible, the restrictions imposed by the non-chosen aspect of materiality would be beyond the scope of the latter (I owe this insight to an anonymous referee). It seems to me that a similar tendency is discernible in the theology of Rāmānuja, who sees God and the world (together with the individual souls) as standing in a soul-body relationship. God and matter form an organic unity, with the latter being inseparable from the former, but still not identical to him (see Lipner 1986, p. 37). Rāmānuja thus tries to accommodate a coeternal material principle within the framework of his eminently monistic approach.

[47] That is, such a god would be triply "impeded", but still all-powerful. First, he would be internally conditioned by his own omnibenevolent nature to produce the creation. Second, and most importantly, his range of choices of generatable possible worlds would be limited by the characteristics of the raw material of creation. Finally, he would be prompted by the decree of his will to respect the law of karma, instituted—just as any natural law—by him alone. Nevertheless, these impediments would not be detrimental to God's omnipotence, because they are either self-imposed, or lie outside the (newly established) boundaries of the metaphysically possible.

5. Conclusions

The three main theodicean treads running through this paper were the proposals of (a) soteriological directedness of the world; (b) solution from personal responsibility (incorporating the concepts of transmigration and karmic retribution); (c) soft ontological dualism, i.e., coeternity of God and matter.[48] Let me at this point try to weave those together, so that they could come close to forming a single cord.

The constitution of our world is not such as to allow for careless pastimes and a pleasurable life of leisure; even the richest, the strongest, the smartest, the most fine-looking members of the human race have only restricted capacities for enjoyment, which often come at a high price. This fact of life is supervenient on the nature of the mortal realm we inhabit. Considering that matter is fundamentally inapt to deliver the gift of eternal bliss, or even of limited period of freedom from disturbance and pain, it is far from audacious to surmise that if there was a creator of the world as we know it, and if he had any purpose behind his undertaking, this might have not been the comfort of the embodied souls, but their awakening to the true value of the human body, which could be seen as a vessel of salvation. Those harsh conditions of suffering and disappointment lived through by the sentient beings may be said to further this supposed goal of life in a twofold manner: in pious persons, they increase the hankering for the Lord,[49] while in the rest of population, they motivate resignation. This is one of the ways God makes the best of a bad bargain: he takes the pre-existent, inherently flawed stuff of creation, and turns it into something beautiful, as far as that is possible. Besides, he gives the imperfections and challenges it carries with itself a noble purpose, which is to bring the souls back to him. However, he cannot cancel out the material cause and its recalcitrance; it always has been, and always will be there to stay.

Matter, the bringer of ephemerality, is thus the principle that stands for the metaphysical aspect of the Leibnizian taxonomy of evil. As a constituent of the cosmos—through its unstable and corrupt nature which is in constant need of mending, through its proneness to irregularity and degradation—it also "contributes" the natural evils, like floods, earthquakes and diseases. Moral evil is brought about by the moral agents' misuse of their freedom of choice, again made easily possible on account of their association and contamination with matter. Accordingly, the theodicy presented above covers both aspects of evil that the contemporary scholars are mostly interested in. The Platonic solution from personal responsibility deals with the moral aspect of the problem, while the coeval entity solution deals with the natural aspect. God himself is, hence, in no way a cause of evil, never a reason behind the sentient beings' sufferings. All evil can be explained as a product of the combination of these two factors—the material cause and the abuse of free will, while the seemingly gratuitous and inexplicable suffering of the innocents can be accounted for by resorting to the doctrines of transmigration and karma. Unlike in the case of most of the theodicies based upon Judeo-Christian theologies, God cannot even be charged with permitting suffering;[50] he has no higher purpose to accomplish through badness. Instead, he is simply prompted to incorporate evil and pain in the constitution of the world on the strength of its material's imperfection and recalcitrance, and on account of the souls' rebellious nature. That is, finally, the answer to the initial query raised in this article's title: "Whence comes evil?"

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[48] Someone may object that offering three answers to a single question is an overkill: a single strategy, e.g., the non-pliability of matter, should suffice as a solution to PoE. However, this is not so. To take a different example, the personal responsibility solution taken by itself might not be adequate to account for the phenomenon of natural evil, etc. Thus, I believe that all three suggested strategies are indispensable as constituents of a single solution: the first one answers the question "why a world at all?"; the second and the third, strictly speaking, dispose of the moral and natural aspect of PoE respectively, although the borderlines in this case are blurred to a significant degree.

[49] A very striking example of such emotion is given in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* I.8.25, where Queen Kunti, who has been subjected—together with her family—to great injustice and prolonged suffering, offers the following prayer to Kṛṣṇa: *vipadaḥ santu tāḥ śaśvat tatra tatra jagad-guro/bhavato darśanaṁ yat syād apunar bhava-darśanam*"—O universal guru, let these calamities befall us over and over again, so that we could keep on seeing you, for thus our repeated births and deaths will cease."

[50] A very recent definition of theodicy, for example, is cashed out in the following words: "A theodicy . . . is a reasonable or plausible justification of God's permission of evil, where this consists in delineating what might be . . . God's purposes for allowing evil" (Trakakis 2017, p. 124, emphasis added).

As far as the Platonic God's role in alleviating universal suffering is concerned, from the aforesaid it follows that, on the face of it, there is not much he can do. We shall have to endure the vicissitudes of life in the physical world, and to put up with our karmas. However, this is only natural: no force or measure can protect an embodied being from the practical PoE, i.e., from the item (a) of the fourfold division of evil proposed in the Introduction to this paper. However, it is my belief that the sketchy portrait of the deity, and the outlines of the associated theodicy presented here, have the potential of easing the troubles caused by the next three items, namely the existential, religious and philosophical PoE. If true, that would be no small solace.

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