

Chapter 13

Theodicy in Another World

Have you not heard his silent steps?
He comes, comes, ever comes.
Every moment and every age, every day and every night,
he comes, comes, ever comes.

Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind,
but all their notes have always proclaimed,
"He comes, comes, ever comes."

In the fragrant days of sunny April,
through the forest path,
he comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights,
on the thundering chariot of clouds,
he comes, comes, ever comes.

In sorrow after sorrow,
it is his steps that press upon my heart,
and it is the golden touch of his feet
that makes my joy to shine.*

Transition

This is a chapter that is ineluctably burdened with preliminaries. Even before the introduction to it, some preliminary remarks are needed about the methodology of it.

The preceding chapters examined in detail four biblical narratives, the stories of Job, Samson, Abraham, and Mary of Bethany. How are these narratives now to be brought into the philosophical discussion of the problem of suffering? How are the narratives to

* Gitanjali, Poem XLV, in *Collected Poems and Plays of Rabindranath Tagore* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 17.

be woven into the philosophical examination of the nature of love that was the subject of Part 2 of this book? How are the narratives to be used in this chapter, which is intended to present Aquinas's theodicy? How is the promise of the first, methodological section of this book to be fulfilled?

One possible answer to all these questions is that the narratives can be used as examples corresponding to philosophical points. There are important similarities and dissimilarities among the narratives, and it would be easy enough just to structure this chapter around the patterns among the stories. In this way, it would be possible simply to use the stories as illustrations of philosophical claims.

To take just one example, consider the end of the four stories. At the beginning of the stories, the sufferers are in different moral and spiritual conditions. Job suffers as an innocent victim and Samson as a perpetrator. Abraham is somewhere in between, and his mixed motives as regards Ishmael are tested in the trial over Isaac. Mary is an intimate friend of Jesus, and so, in the terms of the narrative, she is in a generally good moral and spiritual condition; but she loses heart and trust in Jesus in the course of her suffering.¹ Nonetheless, although in this way in the beginnings of their stories the protagonists are in varying conditions, at the end of the stories, in consequence of their suffering, they are alike in having come to some new greatness. Job has the most sustained face-to-face conversation between God and a human person recorded in the biblical narratives. Samson fulfills his mission and draws near to God when he does so. Abraham becomes the father of a whole people and also the father of faith. And Mary's act of adoration in anointing Jesus is so striking and great-hearted that she becomes emblematic in Christian thought for it. Suffering takes each of the protagonists from where that person is at the start of the story to something incomparably greater by the end of the story.

And so this chapter might well employ the patterns among the stories to provide examples illustrating one or more premisses in an argument about suffering as a means to human flourishing. But, for the reasons laid out in Part 1 of this book, it seems to me that to use the stories in this way is to wreck them as stories. It is to use them only as a sort of picture-book illustration, gratuitous helps for those who like their philosophy with entertainment along the way.

There is something similarly inappropriate, in my view, about bringing the stories in simply as support for a particular premiss in an argument about the problem of suffering. The stories can certainly serve such a purpose. So, for example, all of the stories taken together should motivate some diffidence in our assessment of individual cases of suffering. Because they are stories, each of the biblical narratives gives us considerable insight into the inner life of the protagonist in the stories, the place of the suffering in the trajectory of the protagonist's life, and the protagonist's relation to God. These are not things we generally know when we consider real-life cases of the suffering of others; sometimes, perhaps very often, even the sufferer does not know all of these things. And yet, as the stories make clear, seeing a possible justification for God's allowing suffering is a very different matter if we know the inside, as it were, of the suffering in question and its course.

The external description of a case of suffering, without insight into the inner life of the sufferer, can make the project of theodicy seem difficult or impossible. The external but superficial description of the suffering of Mary of Bethany, for example, is that her brother Lazarus was allowed to die when he could so easily have been healed by Jesus, who failed to come to his aid. Similarly, we can describe Samson's case in the same mode by saying that God allowed Samson to be captured and brutalized by his enemies when Samson could so easily have been allowed one more victory over them. Described in these ways, the suffering in question can look indefeasible, incapable of being redeemed. Is it not blankly unintelligible that God would have allowed Samson to suffer so dreadfully or that Jesus would have let Lazarus die? But, set in a context that includes the psychology and biography of the sufferer, the suffering acquires a very different look. In that context, the point of the suffering is not at all blankly unintelligible.

And so the stories could be used to support an agnosticism, a kind different from skeptical theism, as regards theodicy. Even if skeptical theism were wrong and there were no reason for doubting the human ability to understand God's actions and plans, the stories support the claim that it might still not be possible for us to see a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering in any particular case because the inner life and the psychic trajectory of the sufferer in that case is opaque to us.

Nonetheless, although the stories can be used to support philosophical claims in this way, if this were the sole or main use of the stories, it would strike me as disappointing. That is because such use reduces the complicated richness of a story to some fairly simple moral, thereby undermining the whole point of introducing stories into philosophical reflection, as I explained it in Part 1 of this book.

But, if the narratives are not to be used as illustrations of premisses in an argument about the problem of suffering, or as support for premisses in such an argument, then how are they to be used appropriately?

In Part 1 of this book, I argued that a story, which is a second-person account, can give us something of what we would have had if we ourselves had been participants, even just as bystanders, in the second-person experiences that the story describes. In the same way, the biblical narratives examined in the preceding section constitute a way of sharing and passing on interpersonal experiences, including interpersonal experiences (whether real or imagined) with God, in all their messy richness. These narratively shared experiences can inform in subtle ways our intuitions and judgments, just as real-life experiences do.

As I was at pains to show in Part 1 of this book, I cannot explain exactly what way that is, but it is not necessary for me to do so. Even apart from the evidence and arguments in Part 1, we are all familiar with the phenomenon. What an American learns after numerous extended trips to China cannot be reduced to particular claims about the country, the culture, and the people; the experienced traveler will not be able to explain in numbered propositions what his previous trips have taught him. But, nonetheless, what virtually all of us believe is that, on his *next* trip to China, he will be readily distinguishable from his colleagues who are visiting China for the first time. He will

be able to bridge the gap between American and Chinese cultures by myriad small or large insights hard to summarize or to express at all in any propositional way. Because of his previous experience with China, he will have an understanding of China and its culture and people that his colleagues on their first trip to China will lack; and he will not be able to convey to them in terms of knowledge *that* what he himself has learned. His inexperienced colleagues will have to learn it for themselves through experience on their own trips to China. Or, as I argued in Part 1, they might learn some of it in advance through stories, which lets them participate vicariously to some extent in the experiences their colleague, the experienced traveler to China, has had.

I think, therefore, that the best way to make use of the biblical narratives examined in Part 3 is to let the reflection on them presented in the chapters of that part serve as the equivalent of experience, not the experience of traveling through a country but rather something like the experience of immersion in a worldview. To experience this worldview is, of course, not the same thing as approving of it or being willing to adopt and accept as one's own the things peculiar to it. But, even if one rejects it, the as-it-were travel experience of it will broaden and enrich one's perceptions and judgments of things, altering them in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, much as travel to a very different culture will do even if one is alienated from that culture.

In what follows, then, I will treat the stories as one treats the experience of travel. I will not try to illustrate every philosophical point with an example from one of the stories or try to support every philosophical claim crucial to Aquinas's theodicy with evidence from the stories. Rather, I will let the memory of the preceding readings of the stories inform inchoately or tacitly the reflections in this and subsequent chapters, and I will call attention only to things specially worth remembering explicitly, and even then only where it seems particularly helpful to do so. In effect, I will count on the stories as a common store of experience shared by readers, in the way one might share with others the experience of having been to China, even if one disagrees with one's fellow travelers about the assessment of what one has seen, even if one disputes what the others take to be the facts with regard to the country and its people.

So, in this final part of the book, beginning with this chapter, I will outline and argue for a defense (as distinct from a theodicy); and, for the reasons given here and in Part 1 of this book, I will build that defense based on the stories examined in the previous part, but based on the stories in the loose sort of way in which very many of our views ultimately rest on our experiences.

This is as much as I am prepared to say philosophically on this score, and yet it does not seem to me to be the end of the matter. From my point of view, the stories have an almost inexhaustible richness, and only a fraction of it is extracted in any form in the chapters that follow. When questions arise, as they inevitably will, about the philosophical points made in this part of the book, it seems to me that one profitable way to deal with those questions will be to return to the stories.

With this preliminary consideration of methodology out of the way, the path is smoothed for this chapter and the real introduction to it. Readers should be warned, however, that the chapter that begins below has preliminaries of its own; given

the complicated questions raised by theodicy, there is no professionally acceptable alternative. But readers uninterested in these details and impatient with preliminaries have my blessing to skip straight from the end of the introduction to the section headed "Aquinas's scale of values". The presentation of Aquinas's theodicy properly begins there.

Introduction

The suffering occasioned by the damaging forces of nature, the ravages resulting from the depredations of other human beings, the torment of pain and disfigurement, the anguish of psychic trauma and mental illness, the wretchedness of impoverishment, the misery of being unwanted, the affliction of pariah status, the brokenness of shame, the self-destruction of great moral evil, the ruin of a life and the blighting of its promise, the death of loved ones, the breaking of a heart in the loss of a heart's desire—have I overlooked any suffering of the characters in the stories canvassed in the previous chapters?² Surely no one needs to have it explained to him that all these variegated ills are only a beginning of a list of even the great evils that afflict human beings. For that matter, even a casual acquaintance with the primary sources from the Holocaust or the period of slavery in America is sufficient to show that there are far more cruel evils and agonizing sufferings than any of those described in the biblical stories surveyed in the preceding chapters.

And yet, together, Job, Samson, Abraham, and Mary give us an iconic representation of the panoply of human suffering. The physical pain and mental agony of an innocent victim are pictured in the story of Job. The self-destruction of human evil is evident in the story of Samson. The heartsickness whose source is the deprivation of a heart's desire is portrayed in the story of Abraham. And the misery of being unwanted, shamed, and heartbroken is shown in the story of Mary. Taken together, the sufferings of the characters in these stories constitute a kind of Aristotelian Categories of suffering. All the *modes* of suffering are here, even if many of its species are missing.

How could anything justify God's allowing such suffering? How could anyone believe that there is a world in which such suffering coexists with an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God?

The great majority of philosophers and theologians of the major monotheisms did believe this, though; and Aquinas's position is representative of one strand of that thought. In essence, on Aquinas's theodicy, God is justified in allowing human beings to endure suffering such as that experienced by Job, Samson, Abraham, and Mary in the stories, because, through their suffering and only by its means, God gives to each of the protagonists something that these sufferers are willing to trade their suffering to receive, once they understand the nature of what they are being given.³

I suppose that few people will miss the stunning nature of this claim, but perhaps it is well to highlight it here nonetheless. Aquinas's theodicy commits him to the claim that, if a sufferer were single-mindedly rational in seeing what God was giving him

through his suffering and were whole-hearted in responding to it, he would be willing to accept it on those terms. In such a single-minded, whole-hearted condition, Job would be willing to trade the loss of all his property, his health, his children, and all the rest, in order to receive it. Samson would be willing to trade his eyesight, his liberty, and even his moral decay to have it. Abraham and Mary would be willing to give up a heart's desire for it. Mary would be willing to have it even with the accompaniment of heart-breaking shame. The protagonists in the stories lost their wellbeing or their hearts' desires or both; for all of them, their sufferings were fearful. And yet, on Aquinas's theodicy, when these sufferers are single-minded and whole-hearted, they are willing to accept their suffering for the sake of having what God was offering them through the suffering.

But what is this? What would anyone care about more than his flourishing or his heart's desire? When Abraham, for example, whole-heartedly accepts the objective goodness of God, when he comes to faith and draws near to God, what does he understand about God and his relationship to God that moves him to this attitude? In this chapter, I will explicate Aquinas's theodicy and give his answers to these questions. In doing so, I will presuppose the whole complex discussion of love and union in Part 2 of this book and the exposition of the narratives in Part 3. With that discussion and exposition as the context, in this chapter I will sketch the general outlines of Aquinas's understanding of the solution to the problem of suffering.

Taken in the context of the biblical narratives and encompassed in Aquinas's whole worldview but especially his account of love, Aquinas's theodicy is the defense—or almost all of it—promised at the outset of this book. In my view, although Aquinas's theodicy constitutes a cogent defense as far as it goes, it omits reflection on one crucial element of the problem of suffering—namely, the suffering stemming from the loss of the desires of a person's heart. In Chapter 14, I will argue that this element needs to be taken into account in any theodicy or defense that has a hope of being acceptable. I think, however, that Aquinas's theodicy can be developed, along lines he himself would have approved of, to include this element. As I will try to show in Chapter 14, this development, Thomistic in character, can be woven into the theodicy that Aquinas himself held. The extended Thomistic account, Aquinas's theodicy and the emendation designed to take account of the desires of the heart, constitutes the defense that is the goal of this book.

In Chapter 15, I will turn to an evaluation of this defense; in that chapter, I will ask whether this account constitutes an acceptable response to the problem of suffering. I will argue that it does. In this chapter, however, my aim is not to evaluate Aquinas's theodicy. It is only to present it. Here I will lay out Aquinas's theodicy, taken in the context of the worldview in which it is embedded,⁴ as if I were constructing a science-fiction story—a theology fiction story—about another world, which is still part of our universe of discourse, but which will strike many contemporaries as Martian. My hope in this chapter is to present this world clearly enough so that it constitutes a candidate for a depiction of a possible world in which God and human suffering coexist.

Obviating objections

Although, as I have explained earlier, I am not claiming that this possible world is the actual world since my project is defense and not theodicy, nonetheless some parts of Aquinas's theodicy will still prompt objections just because they seem to raise the problem of suffering over again in a different context. The issue here is not whether Aquinas's worldview is *true* but whether it is *consistent*. In particular, theological doctrines taken for granted in Aquinas's worldview include the doctrine of hell and the doctrine of original sin, but contemporary readers may wonder whether these doctrines are themselves compatible with belief in the existence of a loving God. What if, for example, in Samson's story, the narrative had ended in Samson's going to hell? That is, if in the narrative Samson had not turned again to God at the end of his life but had died in such a way that in an endless afterlife he was permanently alienated from God, would we suppose that, just in virtue of including hell, the story was narratively incoherent in trying to present God as loving?

On Aquinas's views, the doctrines of hell and original sin are certainly compatible with the doctrine that God is good and loving. In fact, Aquinas thinks that the doctrine of hell is an implication of the doctrine of divine love and the fact of the human misuse of free will.⁵ But it is important to see that, if it could be demonstrated that Aquinas is wrong on this score, what would then be required is not a rejection of his theodicy as inconsistent but only a rearrangement of it.

For example, if the doctrine of original sin is rejected, some other explanation of the manifest phenomenon of the ubiquitous human disposition to moral evil will have to be found. And, unless one could make a successful argument for atheism out of such an explanation—something I do not think could be done⁶—that explanation itself will be compatible with belief in God and so can be substituted at the appropriate place in Aquinas's theodicy. The important contribution that the doctrine of original sin makes to the description of the possible world of the defense at issue in this book is just the claim that the human propensity to moral wrongdoing is not the fault of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God. Any other explanation of that propensity with this same implication and compatible with the existence of God is acceptable in the description of the possible world of the defense.⁷

Analogously, if the doctrine of hell is rejected in favor of, say, the position that God annihilates those unable to be saved, as some have argued it should be,⁸ then annihilation will take the place of hell in Aquinas's theodicy. Or, if some version of Origen's universalism is one's preferred account,⁹ then cycles of purgation will play the role that hell does in Aquinas's theory. And so on.¹⁰ What the doctrine of hell contributes to the description of the possible world of the defense is an extrinsic lower bound to the scale of human flourishing. Any other extrinsic lower bound compatible with the existence of God is acceptable in its place in the description of the possible world of the defense.

So, for these reasons, examining the compatibility of Aquinas's theologically controversial positions with belief in the existence of God has considerably less bearing on my project than it might initially seem. I will, therefore, not consider these issues further here. I will incorporate the doctrines of hell and original sin in my description of the possible world of the defense, and I will accept Aquinas's understanding of hell in the theodicy I present in this chapter. But readers who find these doctrines unacceptable should take mention of them as shorthand for their own preferred explanations of the extrinsic lower bound of human flourishing and the human propensity to moral wrongdoing.

The constraints and limits on Aquinas's theodicy

Before we turn to an examination of Aquinas's theodicy itself, something also needs to be said about the constraints and limits on it.

Many of the constraints on theodicy that are insisted on by contemporary philosophers also operate in Aquinas's theodicy. On Aquinas's views, if a good God allows suffering, it has to be for the sake of a benefit that outweighs the suffering, and that benefit has to be one that, in the circumstances,¹¹ cannot be gotten just as well without the suffering; the benefit has to *defeat* the suffering.¹² If *per impossibile* something other than suffering—conversations with God, for example—could have brought Samson to the final redemption he has in his story, then, on Aquinas's views, in the story God would not have been justified in allowing Samson's suffering. In addition, Aquinas accepts a constraint that is controversial in the contemporary discussion¹³—namely, that the benefit in question has to go primarily¹⁴ to the sufferer,¹⁵ whatever good might also be done to other people.¹⁶ If in the story it had been true that God let Job suffer only for some good for Satan, or if God allowed the death of Job's children only for the sake of a good for Job, then, on Aquinas's views, God would not have been justified in allowing that suffering. The fractal character of providence, which is manifest in the story of Job, has one source in this constraint. Since this constraint clearly makes the enterprise of theodicy harder, I will simply note that Aquinas accepts it and leave to one side any consideration of the controversy over it. In the discussion below of benefits correlated with suffering, these constraints should be understood as applying.

As for the limits, as I explained in the first chapter, the suffering at issue in Aquinas's theodicy as I am explicating it here is limited to the suffering of unwilling, innocent, mentally fully functional adult human beings.¹⁷ Aquinas himself pays little or no attention to animal suffering¹⁸ or to the suffering of human beings who are not mentally fully functional adults; and, as I explained in Chapter 1, it is outside the scope of this project to consider whether or not Aquinas's theodicy can be extended to apply to such suffering.

I do not mean to say that in my view the defense I give in this book could *not* be developed and extended in such a way as to apply to sentient sufferers other than mentally fully functional adult human beings. On the contrary, I do not think it would

be easy to rule out the possibility that it could be so developed. In this regard, everything depends on the nature of the sentience of the creature suffering; and, for very many sentient creatures, we are only beginning to understand anything about their sentience.

So, for example, consider this passage from the book on bears by the experienced bear-keeper Else Poulsen:

Bears are born with the mental and physical flexibility required to negotiate the environment in which they are meant to live. This is true for spiders, humans, rats—all animals. Bears have personalities, individual differences, that set the template for how they address life . . . The twentieth-century dogma that we must not anthropomorphize, or attribute human characteristics like emotions to animals, has moved several generations of humans farther away from understanding the creatures we share the planet with. The self-aggrandizing and widespread assumption that we humans have the full complement of all of the emotions possible to all animals on Earth—basically, that all the marbles belong to us—is not only unscientific but also childish . . . Fortunately, human understanding is maturing, and we are learning that animals are emotional, thinking, and self-aware beings relative to the niche they were born to occupy . . . my everyday experiences with animals [have] left me wondering if the researchers who cling to the ideas that animals have no feelings, no problem-solving abilities, and no self-awareness [have] ever interacted with their family cat or dog.¹⁹

A bit later, describing her own process of coming to understand the nature of bears, Poulsen says about one particular bear, Louise: "I am indebted to Louise. She taught me early in my career that a zookeeper's most important tool is relationship."²⁰

Whether the Thomistic defense at issue in this book can be modified and developed to apply to animals will depend on whether the animals in question have the cognitive and conative abilities that allow for relationship, as Poulsen supposes bears do. And so judging whether the Thomistic defense can be transformed to apply to particular cases of animal suffering would require a kind of detailed understanding of the sentience of animals that, for most species, is still largely lacking to us.²¹

On the other hand, of course, it might also be the case that the morally sufficient reason that on Aquinas's theodicy justifies God's allowing suffering of mentally fully functional adult human beings in fact just does not apply to the suffering of all sentient creatures. There is no guarantee that one and only one explanation of suffering applies to all the kinds of suffering that there are in the world.

For these and other reasons, as I explained in Chapter 1, I will leave out of account the suffering of sentient creatures other than mentally fully functional human adults. To reflect on such suffering, to explore whether a Thomistic approach could be developed with respect to it, and to consider what, if any, other approaches to it are possible would require a book in its own right. As I have noted with regret at other places in earlier chapters, it is not possible to do everything in one book.

Another limit on the Thomistic theodicy presented in this chapter has to do not with the nature of the sufferer but with the kind of suffering at issue for theodicy. It is neither suffering that is punishment for moral wrongdoing nor pain that is entirely voluntary.²² The reason for this limit is just that the problem of suffering is not raised by either of these. It is clear enough why pain endured entirely voluntarily does not raise the

problem of suffering. No one wonders about the problem of suffering in connection with such pain just because its endurance is entirely voluntary.²³ Things are somewhat more complicated in the case of suffering for moral wrongdoing, however. In this regard, it is important to distinguish two different ways in which human wrongdoing can result in suffering for the wrongdoer.

On the one hand, there is suffering that is just and appropriate punishment for wrongdoing.²⁴ It is hard to feel sorry for Samson when Delilah betrays him, because her betrayal seems to serve him right. He dallies with her for his own purposes; he is willing to enjoy her, but he does not give himself to her. And so she responds with a lack of commitment to him. She uses him for her purposes, too. If her doing so had caused him sorrow stemming from any care on his part about her relationship to him, it seems that he would have deserved that sorrow. If Samson had grieved over Delilah when he saw that Delilah had betrayed him to his enemies, his suffering would not make us wonder why a good God would permit it. Who minds when a man like Samson, accustomed to toying with a woman, gets a taste of his own medicine? We are not perplexed about what could justify God in permitting suffering of that sort. And so suffering that is thoroughly merited is outside the scope of this project.

By contrast, there is something horrifying about the wrecking of Samson's life. Even if we grant, with my reading of the story, that Samson is guilty of serious moral wrongdoing in his attitudes and actions toward God and in his use of God's gifts to him, the ruin of Samson's life seems out of all proportion to that wrongdoing. The irremediable wrecking of Samson's life, all the blighting of its initial promise, is in some sense the natural outgrowth of the moral evil Samson does. But something can be a natural consequence of moral faults without being appropriate punishment for those faults.²⁵

As in the preceding case, the issue here has to do with what is voluntary or involuntary. Samson may have loved Delilah in some ordinary sense, but he did not mind the effects on her of his keeping her at a considerable distance from himself. In fact, it is hard to suppose that Samson gave much thought to the negative effects of any of his actions on Delilah, or that, if he had done so, he would have cared much about them. The same cannot be said about the catastrophe that Samson made of his life. Samson's deep alienation from God and the shambles of his God-given mission eventuate from the confluence of Samson's actions and the circumstances surrounding them. But, although the devastation of his relationship to God and his divinely appointed life-work was an outgrowth of Samson's attitudes and actions in those circumstances, that outcome was definitely against Samson's will.

In this one regard, Samson is like a negligent self-absorbed hunter who takes a careless shot after a quick glance at something moving in the woods and hits his hunting buddy instead of a deer. His grief over the outcome of his action is an indication of the fact that he would not willingly have brought about the state of affairs that is in fact the result of his morally culpable negligent action. In this respect, what the hunter does is against his will. Analogously, Samson would not willingly have made such a wreck of his life. The object of his involuntary manslaughter is himself. Of course, Samson is not

entirely like the hunter. It is not ignorance of what he is doing that renders what Samson does involuntary in this way. It is rather that Samson is divided in will. Samson has a higher-order desire to be a person who is close to God and who champions the cause of his people. And so, when Samson desires to do, and does, those actions that take both these ends away from him, he is acting against his (higher-order) will, even if it is also true that Samson operates with his own will when he acts self-destructively. Samson's actions and the wreckage those actions make of Samson's life are contrary to Samson's desires about the sort of person he wants to be and the sort of life he wants to live. This is the sense in which what he does is against his will.

Because Samson is divided against himself in acting as he does, because he acts against his own higher-order desires regarding his life and his relationship to God, there is something tragic about his story, as there is about the story of a person guilty of involuntary manslaughter. For this reason, suffering such as Samson's, the wrecking of a whole life stemming from great moral wrongdoing, does fall within the purview of my project, as the suffering that is punishment for wrongdoing does not. With regard to suffering of the self-destructive, life-wrecking kind, we can understand Christ's line that it would have been good for a person who does such evil never to have been born.²⁶ That suffering of Samson's does prompt one to wonder how a good God could allow it.

The limits of this project therefore exclude the suffering that constitutes punishment for wrongdoing and yet include suffering such as Samson's. Given this distinction, it is true to say that the suffering at issue in this book is that of unwilling *innocents*. Samson, of course, is a perpetrator of great moral wrongs, not an innocent. And yet, to the extent to which there is something unmerited about the ruin of Samson's life, there is something undeserved about the suffering of that ruin. In this sense, and only in this sense, there is an innocence about Samson. That is why his destruction is horrifying to us, not satisfying, in the way deserved and appropriate punishment often is, in stories at least if not also in reality. In what follows, talk of the suffering of unwilling innocents should therefore be taken to include suffering such as that experienced by Samson in the ruin of his life.²⁷

An additional clarification of the limits: Suffering unwillingly

I recognize that I have spent considerable space on preliminaries, but there is one more clarification of the limits of Aquinas's theodicy that will be helpful to have in what follows. Although suffering that is entirely voluntary is outside the bounds of this book, there are different ways of being an *unwilling* sufferer. There are those who are in every way unwilling to suffer—those unwilling *simpliciter*—and those who are unwilling only in a certain respect—those unwilling *secundum quid*. Aquinas does not discuss this distinction explicitly anywhere, as far as I know; but in effect he presupposes it and relies on it in many places. This distinction makes a difference in the theodicy Aquinas accepts and defends.

The suffering endured by a person in either group of sufferers is involuntary as regards any particular suffering a person experiences. What distinguishes the persons in one group from those in the other has to do with a particular kind of higher-order acceptance of suffering. It is possible for someone to endure a particular suffering involuntarily and yet to have given a kind of assent to the general endurance of suffering of that type. The possibility of division within the will and the hierarchical structure of the will allow for something to be against the will of the person suffering it, in one sense, while it is nonetheless in accordance with some acceptance of that type of suffering in the higher-order will of that same person.²⁸

For example, when Samson goes to war against the Philistines, he suffers unwillingly anything the opposing Philistine warriors do to him when they attack him; certainly, any particular injury a particular Philistine fighter inflicts on Samson is an injury Samson endures unwillingly. On the other hand, however, in virtue of being willing to go to war, as war is practiced in his time, Samson is in effect accepting the endurance of battlefield injuries of one kind or another. To this extent, when Samson is injured, his suffering that injury is involuntary only in a certain respect. In wanting to be a warrior, Samson is willing to have a will that accepts enduring some battlefield injuries. Similarly, when Abraham obeys God's call to leave his home and wander among strangers, he suffers the depredations of some of those strangers involuntarily. He does not want the king of the country he is passing through to take away from him his wife Sarah, for example. But, insofar as Abraham has voluntarily left the safety and protection of his home, he has implicitly given a higher-order consent to the endurance of the kind of suffering inevitable in his period in the process of wandering as a stranger in foreign territory; and Abraham knows that he has. And so Abraham's suffering the particular depredations from strangers that he does is involuntary, but only in a certain respect. By contrast, when marauders take his cattle and kill his servants, Job's suffering is unconditionally involuntary. Job has not volunteered for it in any respect; it is not a suffering, or a type of suffering, to which Job has given any sort of consent with any part of his will.

The sufferings of the shamed should be classed with sufferings that are involuntary *simpliciter*, in my view, although the understanding of shame I argued for earlier might lead one to suppose otherwise. As I explained in Chapter 7, the suffering stemming from shame is different in important respects from unconditionally involuntary sufferings such as Job's. In order to feel shamed, a person has to assent to the standard by which others shame him (or by which his own psyche attempts to shame him), and he has to accept as appropriate the (real or imagined) marginalization or shunning of others. To this extent, and it is a very limited extent, there is a component of will in the suffering of the shamed; and we feel it. There is no similar component of will in the affliction that comes to Job in the loss of his children, his servants, and his property, or in the physical pain of his bodily ailments. If Job had willed otherwise, he would still have endured those losses and felt that pain. So, if someone supposed that the suffering of a shamed person such as Mary of Bethany had to be classified as involuntary only *secundum quid*, there would be some reason for it. Even so, however, I want to reject this classification

of the suffering of the shamed. Mary's suffering in being shamed differs in relevant respects from Samson's sufferings in battle, for example.²⁹ Mary gives no kind of assent to what others do to her to shame her. To this extent, then, even if there is an element of will in the acceptance of the standard by which the shamed person is shamed, there is no similar acceptance of the suffering itself. The suffering of a shamed person such as Mary is, therefore, more like that of those whose suffering is involuntary *simpliciter* than it is like that of a warrior such as Samson, whose suffering in battle is involuntary only *secundum quid*.

Something similar should also be said about the suffering whose source is the desires of the heart. There is obviously a component of will in this suffering as well. If Abraham had been willing to give up the desires of his heart, he would not have suffered in not having these things.³⁰ And yet, in this case, too, Abraham's suffering is more like Job's suffering over the death of his children than like Samson's sufferings in battle. Of course, it is true of Job that he would not have suffered if, for example, he had stopped caring about his children, so that their deaths meant nothing to him.³¹ But, although neither Abraham nor Job would have suffered as they did if they had not had the desires they did, it remains the case that the contribution of will to their suffering differs from that of Samson as regards the sufferings of battle.

The difference lies in the kind of change of will that would have warded off the suffering. If Samson had decided not to participate in battle but to retire to some island and live in isolation there, he would have evaded battlefield injuries.³² He can escape the bad things that happen to him on the battlefield because he can escape the battlefield. In this respect, his battlefield sufferings lie within the control of his will. Job, on the other hand, can evade his suffering only by ceasing to care about what he in fact does care deeply about. He can do nothing to avoid the death of his children or the illness that brings him physical pain; *those* things are not in the control of his will. It is one thing to evade suffering by escaping injuries; it is another thing to evade suffering by ceasing to care about injuries.

To take suffering that could be evaded only by ceasing to care about something as a kind of voluntary suffering is a contentious and ultimately counter-intuitive interpretation of that suffering, in my view.³³ In any event, it elides the distinction I am concerned to try to draw here, between suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter* and suffering that is involuntary only *secundum quid*. Insofar as Abraham could not escape the things that threaten his heart's desires except by giving up his heart's desires, I will relegate his suffering to the camp of suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter*.

Aquinas thinks that it is possible for a person to have given a generalized assent (explicit or implicit) not just to one particular type of suffering but to suffering in general, understood as a means to inner healing and greater closeness with other persons, including God. On Aquinas's views, commitment to Christianity includes such an assent. That is because a generalized assent of this sort is part of the processes of justification and sanctification; it is at least tacitly included in the volitional component of faith, and it is explicitly part of sanctification.³⁴ For this reason, on Aquinas's views, a

person who has faith, either explicit faith or what Aquinas calls 'implicit faith,'³⁵ suffers involuntarily only *secundum quid*.

The distinction between suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter* and suffering that is involuntary only *secundum quid* is significant in Aquinas's theodicy, as will be clear below.

What Aquinas's theodicy is not

Finally, to ward off gratuitous confusion, it is also necessary to say something briefly about what Aquinas's theodicy is not. Readers who have some acquaintance with the history of Christian thought in general and with Augustine in particular may expect Aquinas's theodicy to be some version of what is often understood, mistakenly, as Augustine's theodicy.³⁶

Augustine struggled with the question of the metaphysical status of evil; and his ultimate conclusion, that evil is a privation of being, was shared by many later medieval philosophers, including Aquinas. 'Privation' here is a technical term of medieval logic and indicates one particular kind of opposition; its correlative is *possession*. A privation is the absence of some characteristic in a thing that naturally possesses that characteristic. Blindness is a privation of sight in Samson, but not in an inanimate object, because, unlike Samson, the inanimate object does not naturally possess sight. For these reasons, evil is *not* simply nothing on Augustine's views, as he is sometimes believed to have maintained. Rather, it is a lack or deficiency of some sort of being in something in which that sort of being is natural.

This position of Augustine's is an attempt to explain, as it were, the ontology of evil. Nothing about this position of Augustine's constitutes a solution to the problem of suffering, nor did Augustine or any later medieval philosophers suppose it did.³⁷ Aquinas himself would certainly not have supposed that anything about the metaphysical status of evil provided a reason for God's permitting suffering to occur.

Augustine is also known for his suggestion that the evil permitted by God contributes to the beauty and goodness of the whole universe, just as a dark patch may contribute to the lightness and beauty of a painting. Some people mistakenly interpret this suggestion on Augustine's part as an attempt at theodicy, too. But, to take this suggestion of Augustine's as an attempted theodicy is to suppose that, for Augustine, the answer to the question why God allows suffering is that suffering has an aesthetic value for God. It seems to me that the moral repulsiveness of such a position is obvious; it would most certainly have been obvious to Augustine and Aquinas.

Aquinas would reject both of these as-it-were theodicies sometimes mistakenly attributed to Augustine because neither of them is compatible with the claim that God would allow a human person to suffer only if through that suffering alone God can provide an outweighing benefit that goes primarily to the sufferer. This is a claim Aquinas himself explicitly asserts. So, for example, he says:

Whatever happens on earth, even if it is evil, turns out for the good of the whole world. Because as Augustine says in the *Enchiridion*, God is so good that he would never permit any evil if he were not also so powerful that from any evil he could draw out a good. But the evil does not always turn out for the good of the thing in connection with which the evil occurs, because although the corruption of one animal turns out for the good of the whole world—insofar as one animal is generated from the corruption of another—nonetheless it does not turn out for the good of the animal which is corrupted. The reason for this is that the good of the whole world is willed by God for its own sake, and all the parts of the world are ordered to this [end]. The same reasoning appears to apply with regard to the order of the noblest parts [of the world] with respect to the other parts, because the evil of the other parts is ordered to the good of the noblest parts. But whatever happens with regard to the noblest parts is ordered only to the good of those parts themselves, because care is taken of them for their own sake, and for their sake care is taken of other things . . . But among the best of all the parts of the world are God's saints . . . He takes care of them in such a way that he doesn't allow any evil for them which he doesn't turn into their good.³⁸

In my view, those who interpret Augustine's aesthetic suggestion as a kind of theodicy have misidentified the question to which his suggestion was meant to be an answer.

For Augustine, and for Aquinas, God's original plan for the world was that the world have in it only good and not evil. On the view Augustine and Aquinas share, evil is first introduced into a good world created by a good God through the misuse of free will on the part of the creatures created good by God.³⁹ Without moral wrongdoing on the part of free creatures, there would never have been suffering in the world. So God permits the misuse of free will and all the suffering consequent on it; but the world as God permits it to be is not the world as God originally planned it. The world as it is now is therefore a result of God's "Plan B," not his "Plan A."

A more theologically respectable way to put this point is to distinguish God's antecedent will from God's consequent will.⁴⁰ God's antecedent will is what God would have willed if everything in the world had been up to him alone. God's consequent will is what God actually does will, given what God's creatures will. For Aquinas, the will with which God assents to suffering is only his consequent will, not his antecedent will. In the circumstances of post-Fall human life, with human misuse of free will, God's consequent will includes allowing human suffering in some cases. In the case of Samson, for example, even when God chooses to withdraw from Samson, so that Samson no longer has the special physical strength he needs to defeat his enemies, God's choice is nonetheless a matter of God's consequent will, not his antecedent will. God's antecedent will for Samson is that Samson have a life without suffering, in union with God.

The claim that all the suffering God allows is willed by God only in his consequent will, however, raises a question: why should we not suppose that there is a defeat for God, a sadness, a deficiency of *some* sort, in the fact that God's consequent will is different from his antecedent will, that God's "Plan A" for the world had to be replaced by God's "Plan B?"⁴¹

This, I think, is the question to which Augustine's aesthetic suggestion is the answer, and it makes sense as an answer to this question. The universe that results from God's

"Plan B" has suffering in it; but, as I think the stories in the preceding section illustrate, it has great compensatory beauty in it as well, a beauty that would not have been possible without the suffering. Plan B therefore is not a defeat. God is able to make a world with suffering in it even more beautiful than the world would have been had there been neither moral evil nor suffering. And so the point of Augustine's suggestion is that Plan B is a triumph for God, not a defeat.

To say this is not to imply that God did or must will the actual world as the best possible world, or that God did or must will the moral evil in the actual world because the actual world has more value than the world would have had without that evil and the suffering it produces. Moral evil is not like pain: it is not morally permissible to cause moral evil as a means to some good. In fact, God does not cause *any* moral evil. He only allows the moral evil introduced into the world by the free choices of creatures. And so, on Aquinas's views, God allows moral evil and its consequences in the sense that with his consequent will he permits it to occur; but God does not cause it or will its existence with his antecedent will. To claim that this world, even with its evil and suffering, is more beautiful than the world would have been without evil and suffering is therefore *not* to explain the morally sufficient reason for God to allow evil. It is one thing to ask why God's allowing moral wrongdoing and suffering does not constitute a defeat for God. It is another thing entirely to ask why God would allow moral wrongdoing and suffering in the first place. It is only the first question that is at issue in Augustine's suggestion about the aesthetics of the post-Fall world.

For these reasons, the two Augustinian positions sketched here will play no role in the Thomistic defense developed in this book.

Aquinas's scale of value

With all these various preliminary explanations behind us, we can begin the examination of what Aquinas's theodicy actually is by considering the standard of value he accepts for human flourishing. Any discussion of the problem of suffering presupposes some standard of value, in accordance with which the existence of suffering is judged at least *prima facie* inconsistent with the existence of a good God. And, insofar as the problem of suffering is an attack on the consistency of religious belief or the consistency of religious belief together with some uncontested empirical evidence, it is appropriate that the scale of value by which that consistency is judged be the scale of value embraced by the system of religious belief in question. It would make no difference to the argument over evil if it turned out, unsurprisingly enough, that the mix of religious beliefs with a scale of values antithetical to those beliefs was inconsistent.⁴²

So suppose that we start with the extrinsic lower limit to human flourishing. What is the worst thing that can happen to a human being?⁴³ Serious illness? The loss of all one's children in a day? Capture and torture by enemies? These are indeed dreadful; but, like Job, a person can suffer the depredations of nature and other human beings as an innocent, and there is still a great good for Job in innocence. What then is the worst? Is it

suffering the ruin of one's life and hopes because of one's own wrongdoing, as Samson did? Even this is not the worst, because, as Samson's story shows, it is possible for there to be re-formation and even flourishing in the wreckage of a life.

For Aquinas, the worst thing that can happen to a person is to become permanently psychically fragmented, permanently alienated from oneself, permanently separated from others, including God. Because a human will is free in a libertarian sense,⁴⁴ it is possible for a human being never to achieve or even to want real closeness or love with God or with any human persons either. And because, on Aquinas's views, human beings are everlasting and not transitory things, a human being is capable of being in such a condition forever.⁴⁵ This is the worst thing that can happen to a human being, on Aquinas's scale of value. To be in this condition is to be everlastingly at a distance from oneself, from all other persons, and from God.⁴⁶ It is to be endlessly isolated from God's redemptive goodness in self-willed loneliness, the full-blown horror only hinted at in Samson's sort of distance from Delilah. On Aquinas's worldview, then, not only does loneliness have something hellish in its ability to cause pain, but also hell, which is the worst thing made permanent, is unendingly lonely.⁴⁷

What underlies Aquinas's adoption of this characterization of the worst thing for human beings is the conviction Aquinas shares with other thinkers in the Christian tradition that personal relationship is the genus within which the greatest goods for human beings fall.⁴⁸ The greatest good for human beings consists in personal relationships of a certain sort. For Aquinas, God is characterized by mind and will; and so, on Aquinas's views, God is a person, in our sense of the word 'person.'⁴⁹ A union of love with God is thus a personal relationship, too. On Aquinas's views, it is the greatest of personal relationships. The greatest good for human beings is to be in a union of love with God.

Furthermore, for Aquinas, this greatest good for a human being is also the best condition of a human being.⁵⁰ To be united with something is to be made one with it, in some sense. To be made one with God in any sense, however, is deification, at least in some analogous sense. And it is hard to see what could be a greater state for a human person than being made like God. So union with God in heaven is an intrinsic upper limit on human flourishing. For this reason, flourishing and greatness co-vary for human beings. For Aquinas, the good of union between a human person and God constitutes both the flourishing and the greatness of the human person in the union.

Finally, on Aquinas's views the hallmark of a great good is that it is shareable, that it is not diminished by being distributed. The union of love with God, which is the greatest of goods for human beings, is consequently also the most shareable. The love of one human being for another is a shareable good, and human loves can themselves be woven into the shareable love between God and a human person. Dante, who is a very good Thomist, tries to portray this idea of Aquinas's by picturing the community of human beings who are united with God and each other as joined through music into one great choral song of joy. On Aquinas's scale of value, the greatest good for a human being is, therefore, more precisely described as the shared union of love among

human beings and God. For Aquinas, heaven is this greatest good made permanent and unending. *This* is the best thing for human beings.

Reasonably enough, then, the worst thing for human beings and the best thing for human beings are correlatives. The unending shared union of loving personal relationship with God is the best thing for human beings; the worst thing is its unending absence. Aquinas's views of the best thing and the worst thing for human beings thus mark out a scale of value on which human suffering and the benefits that might be thought to redeem it can be measured.

As is clear from this scale of value, it is also part of Aquinas's worldview that a human being's life is divided into two unequal portions, one very little portion before death and another, infinitely enduring portion, after death. For reasons having to do not with his theology but with his philosophical psychology,⁵¹ Aquinas maintains that the state of a person at the end of the little portion of his life determines his state in the infinitely extended portion of his life after death. That is, on Aquinas's views, the state of a person after bodily death is *not* determined as a sum of merits or demerits in a life, contrary to what so many people imagine Christian doctrine mandates. It is determined more nearly in the way things go when one person proposes marriage to another: everything depends on the *current* condition, the *current* love, of the person to whom the proposal is made.⁵²

For Aquinas, the openness to God's love that a person has at death becomes the enduring condition of that person thereafter; it is possible for her to grow in various ways thereafter but not to grow or diminish in her very openness to God's love.⁵³ With regard to the best thing for human beings, then, it is as if an Olympic gold-prize winner were to have won for herself not only that prize at that moment in the history of her life but also unending life in a physical condition at least as superlative as that which allowed her to win the Olympic prize. Presumably, that outcome for the athlete would be unending athletic excellence. For a person in heaven, it is a matter of unending excellence *tout court*, and the base-line degree of the excellence is set by her condition at the end of the first, little portion of her life.⁵⁴

In what follows, I will presuppose this part of Aquinas's views as well as his scale of value.

Culture clashes and the logic of the argument

At this initial stage in the presentation of Aquinas's theodicy, some readers, who find mention of heaven and hell childish or worse, will be inclined to wonder whether these elements cannot be excluded from Aquinas's position. Other readers will be inclined to dismiss Aquinas's theodicy out of hand because of the inclusion of these elements.

In this connection, I want to call two things to attention.

First, although (as I explained above) it is possible to preserve the heart of Aquinas's theodicy with some substitution for the doctrine of hell, the same cannot be said about the doctrine of an afterlife for those united to God. It is not possible to excise the doctrine

of heaven from Aquinas's theodicy; on the contrary, that doctrine is central to it in more than one way. So, while the extrinsic lower bound of Aquinas's scale of human flourishing can be understood variously without the destruction of Aquinas's theodicy, at least in outline, the intrinsic upper bound is not reformulable in the same way. It needs to be taken as everlasting shared union with God if Aquinas's theodicy is not to be lost.

Aquinas himself recognizes this point. He understands that to some people the notion of an afterlife will seem absurd, but he also thinks that accepting this notion is essential to his view of suffering. Without the worldview that holds that there is an afterlife and that true happiness consists in union with God in that afterlife, Aquinas thinks that the theodicy he adopts will appear entirely unacceptable. For example, he says:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, it follows that there is no good for human beings other than in this life. And if this is the case, then those people are more miserable who suffer many evils and tribulations in this life. Therefore, since the apostles and Christians [generally] suffer more tribulations, it follows that they, who enjoy less of the goods of this world, would be more miserable than other people.⁵⁵

From his point of view, this last claim is a *reductio* of the rejection of the idea of an afterlife. And he continues his *reductio* in this way: "If there were no resurrection of the dead, people wouldn't think it was a power and a glory to abandon all that can give pleasure and to bear the pains of death and dishonor; instead they would think it was stupid."

So, on Aquinas's own view, in order to see suffering as he does in his theodicy, in order not to see the acceptance of suffering or the justification of God's allowing suffering as senseless, it is essential to include the doctrine that human beings are capable of everlasting union with God in the afterlife. For reasons that will emerge in the rest of this chapter and the next one as well, I concur with Aquinas's attitude on this score. Unlike the doctrine of hell, the doctrine of heaven is not an optional part of Aquinas's theodicy, and there is no substitute for it that will leave the basic character of the theodicy intact.

Secondly, for those whose reaction to this conclusion is "So much the worse for Aquinas's theodicy!", it is important to review briefly the logic of the argument from evil. That argument, which begins with facts about suffering in our world and tries to conclude to the non-existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God, is a challenge to the *consistency* of religious beliefs,⁵⁶ taken in the context of uncontested empirical evidence. A theodicy is an attempt to defend the consistency of religious beliefs (together with such uncontested empirical evidence) by giving the morally sufficient reasons that God in fact has for allowing such suffering. For this reason, the claims of a *theodicy* need to be true. But a *defense* is not a theodicy. A defense attempts only to tell a story about a possible world that contains both God and human suffering and that is enough like the actual world so that, for all anyone knows, this story *could* be true.⁵⁷ A defense, therefore, does not need to claim that the story it tells about this possible world is true.

Of course, if someone could demonstrate that the salient claims of the defense are *false*, that result would make a difference to the defense. Then it would not be the case

that the story of the defense is true for all anyone knows. But, as far as I can see, for all the unpopularity in secular culture of the notion of an afterlife, no one has given even a remotely plausible argument, let alone a demonstration, to show the falsity of the claim that there is an afterlife in which some human beings are unendingly united to God.⁵⁸

I recognize that some people who are committed to rejecting any variety of theism will think that no argument is needed to demonstrate the falsity of a claim that appears so totally counter-intuitive to them. But this is hardly a powerful attack on the Thomistic defense that includes this claim or a cogent support for the argument from evil. On the contrary, commitment to atheism is obviously incompatible with acceptance of the claim that human beings can be everlastingly united to God. The mere repudiation of this claim as counter-intuitive to atheists is therefore a question-begging basis for accepting the argument from evil or for rejecting the Thomistic defense against it. If the argument from evil rests on this question-begging basis, it does not constitute a serious challenge to religious belief.

There is consequently no philosophical reason for failing to include in the description of the possible world of the defense at issue in this book Aquinas's claim, essential to his theodicy, that human beings are capable of everlasting union with God.

Flourishing by degrees

Aquinas's scale of value for human life is thus bounded by upper and lower limits. The complete and permanent absence of loving personal relationships is an extrinsic limit on one end,⁵⁹ and this is hell. The shared and unending loving union with God is the intrinsic limit on the other end,⁶⁰ and this is heaven. Insofar as, ultimately, the only states for human persons are either being in heaven or being in hell, on Aquinas's views the best thing for human persons and the worst thing for human persons are not only mutually exclusive but also, ultimately, jointly exhaustive. Just to have warded off finally the worst thing is, therefore, to have achieved ultimately the best thing.⁶¹

It is important to recognize, however, that the best thing, the intrinsic upper limit of Aquinas's scale of value for human lives, itself comes in degrees. This claim may appear paradoxical, but a moment's thought will dissipate the appearance. As regards physical condition, the best state for human beings is to be in peak physical condition. But human beings differ greatly in what constitutes peak physical condition for them, depending on age, size, occupation, and other things as well. The peak physical condition for an 80-year old, for example, will be considerably less impressive as regards physical condition than the peak physical condition of a 20-year old; the peak physical condition for a person who is slightly built and small in stature will be different from that of someone who is big-boned and tall. Analogously, on Aquinas's views, human beings differ greatly in what constitutes for them the peak human condition of union with God.⁶² That is because it is possible to have more or less of a loving relationship in union with any person. As I explained in Chapter 6, closeness can be more or less rich, and in consequence so can shared attention; since these are ingredients of union, union itself

comes in degrees. So, for example, as the narrative presents things, there was some kind of union of love between each of the two sisters, Mary and Martha, on the one hand, and Jesus, on the other; but in the story it is clear that Mary is closer to Jesus than her sister Martha is.

So, on Aquinas's views, it is possible to have more or less of a loving relationship in union with God. The love and presence of omnipresent God are fully and equally available to all human beings. But there are differences in the willingness and the consequent capacity to receive God's love even on the part of those human beings who are in union with God. Even in heaven, then, the best thing for human beings comes in degrees. In consequence, on Aquinas's views, human greatness does so, too.

It is helpful to have some less clumsy way of referring to the great-making characteristics of human persons whose intrinsic maximum is found in one or another degree of union with God. For ease of reference, and in deference to a long tradition of religious thought, I will refer to the great-making characteristics of human persons stemming from their union with God as their 'glory.'⁶³ Glory, as I am using the term here, is thus *not* a matter of honor or fame. It is a matter of intrinsic and relational characteristics that render a human person objectively excellent as a person to some very great degree.⁶⁴ The peak human condition for a person, the intrinsic upper bound of that person's flourishing, is therefore also the glory of that person, as 'glory' is being used here.

Because union with God comes in degrees, human glory will also vary from person to person among those united to God in heaven. For these reasons, what constitutes the most excellent state for human beings is itself not an all-or-nothing condition; it comes in degrees. We are accustomed to such rankings of excellence, of course, but we are also accustomed to the misery that they bring to everyone except the prize-winners. How could there be human flourishing in heaven, someone might think, if even in heaven there are misery-inducing inequalities of excellence?

In my view, this question arises from a misunderstanding of the Thomistic idea of love. As I explained in Chapter 6, on Aquinas's views, it turns out that the degree of closeness between God and any particular human being is solely dependent on the will of the human being in question. This point applies even to those in union with God in heaven. For this reason, how close to God a human person is in heaven, and how much of glory there is for her, is a function only of how much of God's love she wants and is willing to receive.⁶⁵ Therefore, in the unending shared union with God in heaven, each person has all of the union with God and all of the greatness of human persons that she desires. On Aquinas's views, it is not possible for a person in heaven to want more union with God than she has. In the *Paradiso*, when Dante the traveler asks one of the redeemed in heaven whether she does not envy those among the redeemed who are closer to God, she cannot help it: she laughs at his question. *You don't understand how things work here*, she tells him kindly.⁶⁶ If she were to want more, she would thereby also have it.

I understand that some people will find this position difficult to grasp. They will suppose that any person will always want as much glory and greatness as it is possible to have; therefore, on their view, if a person's glory is a function only of her will for

union with God, there could not be inequalities of glory in heaven. Rather, everyone in heaven would have the same maximal amount. But to think this is to confuse a will to win with a will to be open to love. Someone can want to be greater than others on some scale of value and nonetheless not want those things that are the necessary ingredients of that greatness. Even with regard to love, which one might assume every human being wants, the possibility of division in the human will allows for desire and resistance at the same time. Samson loves Delilah in some sense even while he lies to her and guards himself carefully against her. Problems generated by the double-minded mix of desire for love and resistance to it are a staple of love stories and a source of clients for counselors.

Two kinds of benefit for two kinds of sufferers

With this much description of Aquinas's scale of value for a human life, we can now turn to Aquinas's theodicy proper. As Aquinas sees it, what is the morally sufficient reason for God to allow the suffering of an unwilling, innocent, mentally fully functional adult human person?⁶⁷

On Aquinas's theodicy, God is justified in allowing the suffering of such a person by one or the other or both⁶⁸ of two possible benefits, where Aquinas's scale of value is the measure of the benefits.⁶⁹ Which of the two possible benefits goes to a particular sufferer on any given occasion is a function of the nature of the involuntary suffering; it depends on whether the suffering is involuntary *simpliciter* or only involuntary *secundum quid*. For a person who does not have even implicit faith, whose suffering is involuntary *simpliciter*, suffering is defeated in virtue of its contributing to warding off a greater harm for her. On the other hand, for a person who is committed to a life of faith, whose suffering is involuntary only *secundum quid*, suffering is defeated in virtue of its contributing to providing a greater good for her.⁷⁰

This result is as it should be, in my view. In ordinary cases of suffering permitted or brought about by one person for the good of another, if the suffering is involuntary *simpliciter*, then one person who allows (or causes) the suffering of another is not justified simply in virtue of the suffering's contributing to some greater good for the sufferer, even if the suffering is a necessary means to this greater good. So, for example, a person who is forced to endure semi-starvation and sensory deprivation during extensive confinement in a small space will emerge from that confinement to drink in with intense pleasure and gratitude experiences that other people take for granted. No doubt, the harsh imprisonment is necessary for that heightened pleasure in ordinary things. Even if we were to grant for the sake of argument both that the suffering in such a case is outweighed by the good that the suffering provides later and that this greater good could not be gotten without the suffering, no reasonable person would suppose that such a greater good justifies subjecting a person to such suffering involuntarily.⁷¹ If a mother subjected a child of hers to such suffering for the sake of such a good, we would hope social services would remove that child from that mother.

It would not change our judgment if the mother incurred significant cost and risk to herself as a result of confining the child.⁷² The connection of the involuntary suffering to the greater good of the child is not enough to justify the mother in bringing about such suffering for the child, regardless of what the mother herself might endure in the process.⁷³

On the other hand, in a desperate effort to keep them hidden from the Nazis, certain people subjected Jewish children to just such suffering during the Second World War. And we now honor these people for doing so, because in those circumstances confinement of that sort, with its attendant suffering, was the best or only means available for keeping the children from a much worse fate at the hands of the Nazis. In these circumstances, the confinement with all its hard conditions warding off a greater harm for the children. What we find morally unacceptable when the benefit for the suffering is a greater good we find morally admirable when it involves warding off a greater harm.

On our ordinary moral intuitions, then, for suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter*, warding off a greater harm for a person is a morally acceptable reason for allowing suffering, if the suffering is the best or only means available in the circumstances to that end, but providing a greater good is not.⁷⁴

Our intuitions are different, however, if a person's suffering is involuntary only *secundum quid* and not *simpliciter*. For example, *ceteris paribus*, we would not blame the coach of a team of cross-country runners who forced running up one more hill on his team against their vocal complaints. The greater good of the additional conditioning justifies the suffering inflicted on the team by the coach's demand for more training. In this case, because participation on the team is voluntary and presumably carries with it some assent to suffering in the interest of athletic excellence, our intuitions incline to the view that the involuntary suffering of the team members in their training is justified by the outweighing greater good of their resulting athletic excellence and competitive edge. On our ordinary moral intuitions, therefore, for suffering that is involuntary only *secundum quid*, providing a greater good for a sufferer is (*ceteris paribus*) a morally acceptable reason for allowing suffering if the suffering is the best or only means available in the circumstances for that end.

To hold, as Aquinas does, that warding off a greater harm for a person or providing a greater good for her justifies God in allowing suffering is not to say that God designed the world in such a way as to produce that suffering for that person. It is important to remember in this connection the distinction between God's antecedent and God's consequent will. Aquinas's theodicy rests on a claim about what justifies God in willing what he does in his consequent will. But that is not equivalent to a claim about God's antecedent will, about what God would have willed if human beings had themselves willed something other than they actually did. Aquinas does not think, for example, that God somehow determined tribal raiders to rob Job of his cattle or that the raiders were in accordance with God's antecedent will when they attacked Job. On the contrary, on Aquinas's views, the raiders acted on their own free will in attacking Job's herds. All that is claimed in Aquinas's theodicy is that, in his consequent will, God allows Job to

suffer from the raiders as he does because God sees that this suffering can be turned into a benefit for Job. Because that benefit defeats Job's suffering, God is justified in allowing it. But nothing in this claim presupposes or implies that God wills this suffering for Job in his antecedent will.

Finally, it is helpful to note that, on Aquinas's view of the benefits justifying God in allowing suffering, the explanation for suffering has to do primarily with the state of the sufferer that comes *after* the time of his suffering. On the interpretation I gave of the story, what justifies God in allowing Job's suffering, for example, is not anything Job did before he suffered, contrary to what the mistaken Comforters suppose. Rather, the explanation for Job's suffering has primarily to do with what Job is enabled to become, in consequence of his suffering.⁷⁵ An analogy with medicine is helpful here. Doctors who put a cancer patient through painful surgery and strenuous chemotherapy cause the patient great suffering. The explanation of their justification for causing that suffering lies primarily in the future, rather than in the past. The medical treatments are justified by what they enable the patient to be—namely, a healthy or at least a living person. Two patients whose cancers are identical and identically advanced may get very different treatments from the same doctors, depending on the doctors' estimation of the effects of those treatments on the patients. The bone-marrow transplant that may cure the young woman of her multiple myeloma might kill the old man who has the same disease at the same state of development, because his system is no longer able to respond well to the treatments as hers is. And so the doctors will be justified in giving her the medical treatments they deny him based on their estimation of the future states of the patients. Although the doctors consider the current state of each patient, it is their estimate of the future state of each patient that justifies their decision to treat or not to treat the patient.

The nature of each benefit

On Aquinas's views, union with God features in each of the benefits justifying God in allowing suffering. The greater harm ward off is the permanent absence of union with God, and the greater good provided is the increased degree of everlasting shared union with God.

Since, on Aquinas's scale of value, permanent absence of union with God is the worst thing that can happen to a person, the negative value of the permanent absence of union with God outweighs the negative value of suffering of any other kind. Avoiding that outcome is, therefore, of more value for a person than avoiding any other kind of suffering. Analogously, since union with God is the intrinsic upper limit to human flourishing, attaining this union is of greater value for a person than avoiding suffering. On the face of it, then, the obvious question for Aquinas's theodicy is not whether the good of the benefit outweighs the suffering in any given case but rather whether the suffering is appropriately connected to one or the other of these benefits.⁷⁶ Even if we weigh the relative value of the benefits and the suffering as Aquinas does, why

suppose that suffering is connected to these benefits as it needs to be for the purposes of theodicy?

I raise this question here only because it prompts us to take a closer look at the nature of the benefits that are supposed to defeat suffering. (I will raise the question again in a different way in the final chapter, when I turn to the evaluation of Aquinas's theodicy as a defense.) If we are going to understand Aquinas's claim that suffering can bring about these benefits for the sufferer, we need to be clear about the nature of the benefits. It is helpful in this connection to review briefly Aquinas's views of union with God as I explained them in earlier chapters.

For Aquinas, the primary obstacle to any person's flourishing in union with God comes from dispositions in that person's will that incline him to prefer his own short-term pleasure and power over greater goods. On Aquinas's understanding of the doctrine of original sin, all human beings have this disposition, which is a sort of cancer of the will,⁷⁷ a proneness to evil that eventuates in moral wrongdoing sooner or later and that can blow up into moral monstrosity.⁷⁸

On Aquinas's views, a human person can be internally integrated only around the objective moral good. Not all internal fragmentation stems from moral wrongdoing; shame contributes to internal divisions in the psyche as well. The double-mindedness and internal conflict in Mary of Bethany, for example, have shame as at least one major source. Nonetheless, all moral wrongdoing contributes to psychic fragmentation, and so no human being who remains uncured of the disease of the will can be internally integrated.

This lack of internal integration undermines or obviates closeness between persons. Even God cannot be close to a human being who is internally fragmented and alienated from himself. Perfectly loving God desires the good for each human person and union with each person. And omnipresent God is present to each human person, in the sense that God is able and willing to be close to him and to share attention with him if he wants to share attention with God. But even God cannot be present to a person with significant personal presence unless that person is willing to be close to God, with all that that closeness entails.

On Aquinas's views, then, the obstacle to a person's having the best thing for human beings, shared union with God, is that person's internally divided state.⁷⁹ Since the best thing for human beings and the worst thing for human beings are jointly exhaustive, warding off the worst thing for any human person is also a matter of healing this internally divided condition. Aquinas takes justification and sanctification to be the means by which a person is healed of this disease of the will; by these means, a person becomes internally integrated around the good. Each of these processes involves a human person's giving up resistance to God.⁸⁰

Justification occurs when a human person recognizes and rejects the moral evil in himself and yearns for God and the goodness of God. Aquinas takes this as the volitional component of faith. Faith includes an act of will that is a global second-order desire for a will that wills the good.⁸¹ This volition is not a result of any kind of praiseworthy activity on the part of the willer. Rather, God forms this volition in a person once that

person surrenders resistance to the love of God—that is, once he surrenders to God and lets the desire for God come to him. This kind of surrender can begin a first conversion to God, but it can also be the start of regeneration after the shipwreck of a life, as it is in Samson's case. Insufficiently reformed as they are at the end of the narrative, Samson's desires and his relationship with God at the end of his life are the result of a surrender to God that regenerates what is best in him and for him.

Aquinas takes faith to be the sole necessary and sufficient condition for warding off the worst thing for human beings. While the act of will of faith remains in a person, permanent willed loneliness is ruled out for him. Samson's surrender in faith to God's love is sufficient for saving him from that worst thing for human beings, even if a lot of the old Samson remains in him till his death. Warding off for a person the greater harm of permanent absence of union with God requires only bringing about and maintaining in him the volitional component of faith.

For Aquinas, the morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter* for a person is the role of such suffering in bringing that person to surrender to the love of God and, through that surrender, to the act of will in faith constitutive of justification.

The process begun by justification is continued by sanctification. It is possible for a person to have the second-order will of faith and also to have a first-order will that wills what it ought not to will, and so the act of will in faith is compatible with any amount of first-order willing of particular evils.⁸² When a person's will is in this condition, he still fails to be integrated around the good to some degree. To this extent, however, he is also less able to be close to God, less united with God, than he might otherwise be. The desire for God in faith is the beginning of a relationship in love with God, and it culminates in union with God if a person perseveres in it. In the process of sanctification, however, God works together with the will of a human person in a cooperative enterprise that gradually integrates her more and more in goodness. Since internal psychic fragmentation is the sole obstacle to a person's union with God, sanctification thus brings a person into as deep a union with God as she is willing to have. Insofar as her greatness is correlative with the deepness of her union with God, sanctification glorifies her.

So sanctification presupposes justification, and justification includes a surrender to God in love. In justification, a human person is passive, rather than active; that is why, in justification, God's grace is only operative, not cooperative. On the other hand, unlike justification, sanctification is a matter of cooperation between God and a human person. A human person cannot be in the process of sanctification in an entirely involuntary way; just because sanctification is a matter of cooperation between God's grace and a human will, a human person in the process of sanctification actively wills to draw nearer to God. Insofar as suffering is a means to justification, therefore, the suffering involved is involuntary *simpliciter*; but the suffering resulting in sanctification is by contrast involuntary only *secundum quid*.

Consequently, the benefit for the suffering whose aim is the sufferer's surrender to God's love is the warding-off the worst thing for human beings. The benefit for the

suffering whose aim is growth in internal integration in the cooperative process of sanctification is the increased closeness to God and the correlative increase in human flourishing and glory.

Finally, justification and sanctification are also the antidote to the internal alienation stemming from shame. The shame of Mary of Bethany is healed, partially and then wholly, in her relationship to Jesus, who is recognized in the story as the son of God (as Martha's confession to Jesus makes explicit). The love Jesus has for Mary and Mary's ability to accept and rejoice in that love are healing for those things in her psyche broken by shame. To be loved by God is to be desired by God, and so to be desirable by the greatest standard of all. To be in a relationship of mutual love with God is also to be able to give to God, as well as to receive from God; and there is ultimate honor in giving to the Deity. When Jesus protects Mary and allows her to anoint him, especially in the first anointing but also in the second, he honors her in a way that itself shames the standard by which her community originally shamed her. But neither of these healings of shame would have come to Mary if she had not been willing to be open to the love offered her, in the way Aquinas takes to be central to justification and sanctification. So the antidotes to shame—beauty and honor—are also effects of justification and sanctification.

On Aquinas's views, then, justification and sanctification include the healing of all the varieties of internal alienation,⁸³ and so they bring a person into as much union with God as she is willing to have. The resulting benefits defeat suffering for that person, on Aquinas's theodicy.

In discussing the book of Job, I argued that in that narrative there is a fractal character to God's providential care for sufferers. Any particular case of suffering is embedded in the story of that sufferer's life, and the sufferer is the chief protagonist of that story. But each such story will be thoroughly interwoven with the life stories of other people; and each of those other people is the protagonist in *his* story, even if he has only a small part in the life story of someone else. To talk about the suffering Job has in the loss of his children and the possible benefits that might defeat that suffering for Job is to say nothing at all about the suffering each of those children endures in consequence of dying in that way at that time, or about what benefits might defeat that suffering for that child. Each person's suffering is the proper topic for the narrative in which that person is the chief character.

If (contrary to Aquinas's view) the good for human beings were such things as winning a war, say, and if each side in a battle prayed to God to win that war, then it would be hard to understand how divine providence could find a way to deal providentially with all the parties in the war in such a way as to answer their prayers and defeat their battlefield sufferings. That is, of course, because, as long as both sides are actively engaged in war—that is, as long as the warring parties do not resolve their differences or puddle down into a truce—then *somebody* will have to lose that war. But, on Aquinas's scale of values, it is much less difficult to understand how providence can provide the good for every human person. Unlike the prize of winning a war, the relational good of union with God is infinitely shareable without diminution, and it is available to every human person no matter what that person's external circumstances might be.

Having that relational good is a matter of that person's psychic state, not his external circumstances.

And so the fractal nature of the providential guiding of human suffering and of the benefits able to defeat it are easier to see on Aquinas's theodicy and the scale of value it presupposes. In virtue of being a great good, the good that is the intrinsic upper limit of human flourishing, union with God, is a good that does not diminish when it is distributed, and so it is an infinitely shareable good. Of course, it is possible that a human person have her heart set on a *small* good—that is, a good that *does* diminish when it is distributed. But I mention this worry only to set it to one side; I will return to it in the next chapter, which is devoted to the desires of the heart.

The role of suffering in warding off the worst thing

Although Aquinas thinks that suffering plays an important role in the processes of both justification and sanctification, he gives few hints about the means by which, as he supposes, suffering has the effects it does in these processes. And so it seems to me better to leave out of the account of his theodicy any attempt at detailed explanation of the particular psychological mechanisms by which suffering influences the state of will sought in justification and sanctification. I will, therefore, highlight the role Aquinas attributes to suffering in justification and sanctification, but I will leave vague and unexplored the specific means by which Aquinas supposes suffering fills that role. (In the final chapter of this book, however, I will present and discuss studies in contemporary psychology that seem to confirm Aquinas's position on this score.)

Because Aquinas thinks of justification and sanctification as healing for a human psyche, he often speaks of suffering as God's medicine for the psychic disorder of post-Fall human beings. In this attitude, he is representative of a centuries-long medieval tradition. Augustine, for example, says:

The Physician to whom we have unreservedly entrusted ourselves and from whom we have the promise of the present life and of the life to come—that Physician sees these things [hunger, thirst, and other bodily sufferings] as helpful remedies . . . He governs and guides us so that we may be consoled and exercised in this life and so that in the life to come we may be established and confirmed in eternal rest.⁸⁴

In his commentary on the Apostles' Creed, Aquinas himself says:

If all the pain a human being suffers is from God [as Aquinas thinks it is], then he ought to bear it patiently, both because it is from God and because it is ordered toward good; for pains purge sins, bring evildoers to humility, and stimulate good people to love of God.⁸⁵

In his commentary on Thessalonians, Aquinas remarks on one part of the process he mentions in the quotation above. He says:

As water extinguishes a burning fire, so tribulations extinguish the force of concupiscent desires, so that human beings don't follow them at will . . . Therefore, [the Church] is not destroyed [by

tribulations] but lifted up by them, and in the first place by the lifting up of the mind to God, as Gregory says: the evils that bear us down here drive us to go to God.⁸⁶

Aquinas comments in great detail on the line in Hebrews: "whom the Lord loves he chastens."⁸⁷ He says, for example:

Since pains are a sort of medicine, we should apparently judge correction and medicine the same way. Now medicine in the taking of it is bitter and loathsome, but its end is desirable and intensely sweet. So discipline is also. It is hard to bear, but it blossoms into the best outcome.⁸⁸

The same general point appears recurrently in Aquinas's commentary on Job. Arguing that temporal goods such as those Job lost are given and taken away according to God's will, Aquinas says:

someone's suffering adversity would not be pleasing to God except for the sake of some good coming from the adversity. And so although adversity is in itself bitter and gives rise to sadness, it should nonetheless be agreeable [to us] when we consider its usefulness, on account of which it is pleasing to God . . . For in his reason a person rejoices over the taking of bitter medicine because of the hope of health, even though in his senses he is troubled.⁸⁹

In commenting on a line in the book of Job containing the complaint that God sometimes does not hear a needy person's prayers, Aquinas says:

Now it sometimes happens that God hearkens not to a person's pleas but rather to his advantage. A doctor does not hearken to the pleas of the sick person who requests that the bitter medicine be taken away (supposing that the doctor doesn't take it away because he knows that it contributes to health); instead he hearkens to [the patient's] advantage, because by doing so he produces health, which the sick person wants most of all. In the same way, God does not remove tribulations from the person stuck in them, even though he prays earnestly for God to do so, because God knows these tribulations help him forward to final salvation. And so although God truly does hearken, the person stuck in afflictions believes that God hasn't hearkened to him.⁹⁰

For Aquinas, then, all suffering is medicinal for the parts of a person's psyche in need of healing. For those who are already internally integrated to one or another degree, the experience of suffering enables them to open in a deeper way to the love of God, as Aquinas says in the commentary on the Creed. But for those who are very divided within themselves, suffering is medicinal in the sense that, as Aquinas puts it, it helps the sufferer forward to salvation. Samson's distance from Delilah is symptomatic of a destructive internal division within Samson himself; it keeps not only Delilah but even God separated from him. There is something derisory about Samson in his jaded, self-protective condition when he is dallying with Delilah in enemy territory and using his great strength for nothing more admirable than fly swatting occasional Philistines. The subsequent wreckage of Samson's life is a natural outgrowth of his deplorable choices and acts. But the suffering that comes to Samson in consequence is also a means for healing Samson of the psychic ills that are deadly to what he himself cares about. On the interpretation of the narrative I argued for, God allows Samson's dreadful suffering in the spirit in which a loving mother allows her child to have a bone-marrow

transplant: there is a chance that this suffering, however terrible, will save the loved person, who is otherwise in danger of something even worse.

On Aquinas's view, God is justified in allowing such suffering for a person in Samson's condition in virtue of the contribution suffering makes to warding off the worst thing that can happen to that person.

The role of suffering in providing the best thing

Given Aquinas's view of suffering as medicinal for the human psyche, one might be tempted to think that Aquinas would also take a person's suffering to be in direct proportion to her need for psychic healing. One might suppose, that is, that, since Aquinas thinks suffering is medicinal in integrating a person around goodness, then he would also think that a person who was more integrated in goodness would need and get less suffering. But, in fact, Aquinas's position is just the opposite. On Aquinas's theodicy, the more a person is integrated around goodness, the more likely it is that she will experience suffering. In explicating two metaphors in one of Job's speeches,⁹¹ comparing human beings in this life to servants of a great lord and to soldiers on a military campaign, Aquinas makes the point in this way:

It is plain that the general of an army does not spare [his] more active soldiers dangers or exertions, but as the plan of battle requires, he sometimes lays them open to greater dangers and greater exertions. But after the attainment of victory, he bestows greater honor on the more active soldiers. So also the head of a household assigns greater exertions to his better servants, but when it is time to reward them, he lavishes greater gifts on them. And so neither is it characteristic of divine providence that it should exempt good people more from the adversities and exertions of the present life, but rather that it reward them more at the end.⁹²

Aquinas's sense that the inner wholeness of a person renders her more, rather than less, likely to suffer can be understood in light of his taking suffering as medicinal. Strenuous medical regimens are saved for the strongest patients, in the hopes of bringing them to the most robust health and functioning. And so, on Aquinas's theodicy, for those people who are psychically more healthy, the benefit that justifies suffering is the connection between suffering and glory.

It is because of this understanding of suffering that, in the passage from Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job* cited in Chapter 1, Gregory finds it so perplexing when good things happen to good people. If apparently good people really are good on the relativized human standard of goodness, that is, if they really are in the process of moral regeneration that integrates them around the good, then, Gregory thinks, God would bless them with the medicine of suffering to move them forward to even further sanctification. The absence of suffering in the lives of such people is, therefore, mysterious to Gregory. Chemotherapeutic regimens are withheld from people with cancer only in case they are so ill that the therapy cannot do them any good. That is why, when good things happen to good people, Gregory finds the ways of providence so hard to understand.

This is a common attitude in Christian thought and can be found much earlier than the work of either Aquinas or Gregory.⁹³ John Chrysostom, for example, puts the idea in terms of honor. He says: "What then? 'Is there nobody', someone asks, 'who enjoys comfort both here and hereafter?' This cannot be . . . it is impossible. It is not possible, not possible at all, for one who enjoys an easy life and freedom from want in this world . . . to enjoy honor in the other world."⁹⁴ And a little later Chrysostom adds: "The present life is an arena; in the arena and in athletic contests the man who expects to be crowned cannot enjoy relaxation. So if anyone wishes to win a crown, let him choose the hard and laborious life, in order that after he has striven a short time here he may enjoy lasting honor hereafter."⁹⁵

Aquinas's position is similar. So, for example, he says: "All the saints who have pleased God have gone through many tribulations by which they were made the sons of God."⁹⁶ In his commentary on Thessalonians, Aquinas presupposes the same point in considering the ultimate tribulation, the sufferings in the eschaton: "Many who are alive [in the eschaton] will be tried in the persecution of Antichrist, and they will surpass in greatness the many who had previously died."⁹⁷ Elsewhere, in making the point more generally, Aquinas says simply: "from sufferings borne here a person attains to glory."⁹⁸

These and many other passages make it clear that, for Aquinas, in virtue of the role suffering plays in the process of sanctification, there is a connection between suffering, on the one hand, and glory in shared union with God, on the other. It is not surprising, then, to find that Aquinas sees a person's enduring severe suffering as a sign of the spiritual greatness of the sufferer.

From Aquinas's point of view, then, the portrayal of the suffering of the protagonists in the preceding narratives makes sense. Abraham is called by God to endure the troubles of homelessness, the wearisome pains of a heart's desire recurrently disappointed, and the anguish of surrendering that heart's desire once he has it. At the end of his story, he has struggled his way to a deep trust in God that makes him a father of faith as well as a patriarch of many peoples. Mary is heartbroken when her beloved brother dies and she supposes she does not matter to Jesus, whom she loved, in whom she had reposed her greatest trust. But at the end of her story she has come closer to Jesus than even the apostle on whom Jesus founds his church. Peter assents to having his feet washed by Jesus, who thereby gives care to Peter. Mary washes the feet of Jesus, who is willing to receive care from Mary; and the way in which Mary washes his feet, heedless of herself and unstinting in love, becomes woven into the Gospel narrative itself. Job begins by losing all that apparently constitutes flourishing in his society. But at the end of his story God comes to talk to him face to face in the most extensive and powerful conversations between God and a human person recorded anywhere in the biblical narratives. After their suffering and because of it, these sufferers become icons of human greatness, whose stories are worth preserving through many centuries and cultures.

Something of the same sort is true even of Samson, as Milton's play about him illustrates. Given Samson's condition at the end of his life, his suffering is justified in virtue of its contribution to warding off for Samson the worst thing for human beings.

But, as things turn out, because Samson reacts passionately and positively in the process of his suffering, his suffering also contributes to making him glorious, in the way Samson himself wanted to be. For Samson, we might say, sanctification follows justification in swift succession.

In all the stories, then, in varying ways, each of the protagonists receives his own flourishing and greatness in exchange for what his suffering deprived him of in his earthly life. On Aquinas's theodicy, that benefit is everlasting, and the exchange is one that every person ought to be willing to make because he receives vastly more of what he cares about than he loses in his suffering.

Because Aquinas holds that the suffering for those able and willing to receive it as sanctifying contributes to the best thing for human beings, he also thinks that there is something to exult in as regards such suffering, however appalling it is in its own character as suffering. So, for example, he says:

It is a sign of the ardent hope which we have on account of Christ that we glory not only because of [our] hope of the glory to come, but we glory even regarding the evils which we suffer for it. And so [Paul] says that we not only glory (that is, in our hope of glory), but we glory even in tribulations, by which we attain to glory.⁹⁹

If we saw only the pain and suffering of athletes training for major competitions and never saw any scenes of athletic glory and prize-winning, we would have a seriously wrong view of suffering in athletics. Analogously, from Aquinas's view, the involuntarily endured suffering of a person of faith has to be viewed in the context of that person's everlasting condition in the afterlife. The powerful admiration excited by the excellence of great athletes can inspire something close to envy about their ability to endure suffering in training. Analogously, although any reasonable person reading the stories in the preceding section would shrink from the suffering of the protagonists in those stories, most readers are also willing to accord those protagonists great admiration by the stories' end. From Aquinas's point of view, the greatness on the part of a person whose suffering has brought him to glory in shared union with God can make that person's endurance of suffering look worth having, too.

Many contemporaries will cringe at these lines, of course, but that is because they think there is no such thing as everlasting glory in heaven, not because they would be unwilling to accept suffering to win it if they thought it were there to be had.

A Molinist objection and a clarification

At this point, it will help elucidate Aquinas's position if we consider briefly a possible Molinist objection to it. Some people, the intellectual descendants of Molina, suppose that God has what is called 'middle knowledge.'¹⁰⁰ This includes knowledge of what a person *would* freely do in certain circumstances, as distinct from foreknowledge, which includes knowledge of what a person *will* freely do at a certain future time. If God has middle knowledge, as well as foreknowledge, then God knows what suffering would

be efficacious in a person's life to bring that person to salvation and glory. In that case, Molinists will maintain, even on Aquinas's theodicy God would not allow any suffering that did not in fact bring inner healing to a person. There could not, therefore, be any suffering to which a person reacts by turning away from God.¹⁰¹ But manifestly there is. And so, the Molinist objection runs, Aquinas's theodicy has a plainly false implication.

The contemporary debate over Molinism has prompted an extensive philosophical literature, and I cannot enter into that debate in passing here. As far as I can see, Aquinas does not accept Molinism. On his view of God's knowledge, it is not true, for example, that God knows what Job would have done if prosperity and commitment to God had never been connected either in Job's worldview or in Job's world, not because there is a defect in God's omniscience but because there is nothing there to be known. But it is not necessary to adjudicate the opposing positions in this case. That is because it is possible to sidestep the objection I am here attributing to the Molinists. This objection presupposes that, if God knew that a particular case of suffering would not have the effect of moving a person closer to God, God would not allow that suffering. But this supposition seems to me false, and its falsity does not depend on the truth or falsity of Molinism.

To see this point, consider that, in any given instance of the sort of inefficacious suffering at issue for the Molinist objector, it might be the case that without the suffering the sufferer would be moved even further away from God than he currently is or than he would be without the suffering.¹⁰² Think of the example of Satan in the book of Job, for example. Or, for a case drawn from history, consider, for example, Albert Speer. Speer's suffering in consequence of the defeat of the Nazis did not in fact move him closer to God, at least not if his voluble expressions of repentance were self-deceived or hypocritical, as many people take them to be. But it also seems very plausible to suppose (even in the absence of middle knowledge) that without the suffering he experienced in Germany's defeat Speer would have become a much worse man than he actually was after the war. So, even if it does not produce increased closeness to God, suffering can be justified because it wards off even further distance from God.¹⁰³

Furthermore, and more importantly for my purposes, there is something worthwhile about giving a person an opportunity for a good thing even if one were in a position to know he will not take that opportunity. This is the sort of case that would be exemplified in God's relations with Satan in the framing story in the book of Job if we were to read the story with the theological belief that Satan is incapable of repentance and reform. We can understand cases of this sort as a matter of giving power to a person, whether or not he is willing to use that power.

To see this point, consider an imaginary development of the narrative of the relationship between Abraham and his son Ishmael. Suppose that, when Abraham was an old man, he wanted to ask Ishmael's forgiveness for not having been a better father to him. But suppose also that at that time Abraham had moral certitude that his son Ishmael would never grant that forgiveness because he was so sunk in hatred of Abraham. It could still be good for *Ishmael* that Abraham ask Ishmael for his forgiveness.

The narrative of *Ishmael's* life would be better if Abraham asked his forgiveness; if the story of *Ishmael's* life lacked that petition on Abraham's part, it would be a worse story and a worse life for *Ishmael*. That is because, before Abraham asks forgiveness of *Ishmael*, it is not in *Ishmael's* power to be reconciled with Abraham.¹⁰⁴ After Abraham asks forgiveness, *Ishmael* does have this power. The acquisition of this power is a good for *Ishmael* even if he does not use it. So, even when one is in a position to know that a sufferer will not use the opportunity for healing acquired through suffering, it may nonetheless be good that the sufferer have it.

And, as I argued in connection with the portrayal of Satan in the story of Job, there is love in offering such power, such opportunity for good, to a person. Even if it were true in that story that God knew that Satan was irredeemable, there is still love in God's wrestling with Satan. God's engaging with Satan as he does contributes to a good for Satan and manifests a desire for as much closeness to Satan as Satan will allow; and so, on Aquinas's account of love, God's engaging with Satan in this way is an expression of love toward Satan. That love is a good thing to have in the world, even if Satan does not accept it.

On Aquinas's theodicy, then, suffering offers a power for movement toward God in the process of justification or sanctification. Even if this power is not used, even if God were to know in advance that it would not be used either for additional closeness to God or for less distance from God, there is still a good for the sufferer in having been offered that power. And there is God's love for the sufferer in offering it.¹⁰⁵

For these reasons, the Molinist objection to Aquinas's theodicy is mistaken. Even if Molinism were true (contrary to what I take Aquinas's position to be), Aquinas's theodicy need not be committed to the implication that all suffering moves a sufferer closer to God, or to the implication that God is not justified in allowing suffering if it does not succeed in moving a sufferer closer to God.

The refolding phenomenon

As these remarks about the Molinist objection highlight, what effect any particular case of suffering has in the life of a particular person is a function of that person's freely willed reaction to that suffering. It is possible for a sufferer freely to reject the good of those benefits.¹⁰⁶ Because the benefit of justification or sanctification depends on being appropriated by the free will of the sufferer, suffering alone cannot cause these benefits. Aquinas's image of suffering as medicinal is therefore apt, because, on his views, suffering, like many life-saving medical treatments, is not guaranteed to be successful without the cooperation of the sufferer. Consequently, it would be more precise to say that, for Aquinas, the chance of keeping a person from the worst thing is the morally sufficient reason for God's allowing the suffering of those who are turned away from him; and the chance of transforming a person into something everlastingly glorious is the morally sufficient reason for God's permitting the suffering of those who are closer

to him and morally and psychically stronger. If a person rejects the benefit of either justification or sanctification that might have been brought him by his suffering, that suffering will still provide at least this benefit for him—namely, the good of having been offered the opportunity to move closer to God in justification or sanctification or both.

Which of these roles suffering plays in regard to a particular person's suffering on a particular occasion—justification or sanctification—is a function of that person's response to that suffering on that occasion. In consequence of his response, any particular suffering can change its character. We are accustomed to the idea that a protein can be folded in different ways and that, at least in the case of proteins (if not everywhere), the Aristotelian idea that function follows form is right. The same protein can have radically different functions, depending on its folding.¹⁰⁷ Because of the role of free will in the appropriation of the benefits defeating suffering, suffering is also like this on Aquinas's theodicy. So, for example, a particular case of suffering that might have contributed to a sufferer's sanctification can, as it were, refold into a suffering contributing to the sufferer's justification if the sufferer reacts to the suffering by turning away from God and goodness. If Job had cursed God, as Satan hoped he would, then Job would not have emerged from his suffering glorious in the way that he does in the story. But then Job's dreadful suffering would have contributed to his justification, rather than his sanctification.

On the other hand, nothing keeps suffering whose main benefit would have been warding off the worst thing for the sufferer from being a benefit contributing to the glory of the sufferer because he responds to it in great-souled ways. In virtue of Samson's response to his suffering, for example, justification and sanctification are virtually simultaneously effected for him. Through his suffering, and his response to that suffering, Samson is not only restored to relationship with God but is brought to the fulfillment of his mission. He is made something that he himself wanted to be and that he himself would have found greatly admirable if he had seen it in others. As Samson's story shows, then, it is possible for a person to be simultaneously irremediably broken and also glorious. A person can be very far from physical or psychological well-being (or both), as Samson is in the story, and nonetheless have a life that exemplifies something of the best in human beings, in which the sufferer has his flourishing. Aquinas's scale of value, which ties human excellence and flourishing to relationship with God, supports such an evaluation.¹⁰⁸ But it is also an evaluation held by people who neither know nor care about Aquinas's views. A look at those among the poor who were broken in some way and yet are greatly admired by one or another subgroup within contemporary Western culture makes the point.¹⁰⁹

Consequently, there is no one assessment of a person's condition on the basis of which all suffering in that person's life is distributed. Rather, the process of building a second-personal connection to God, in which suffering has a role, is like the analogous process between human persons, at least in this respect, that the nature of the connection is continually changing and shifting, depending on the choices of the persons involved, from one time to another.¹¹⁰

Suffering and consolation

Even with this much clarification, Aquinas's theodicy is still not presented in full. What is yet missing is his understanding of the role of divine consolation.

Because God is omnipresent¹¹¹ and perfectly loving, Aquinas thinks that all suffering is encompassed even in this life by the love of God. Some experience of the personal presence of God, significant personal presence with mutual closeness and shared attention, is possible for all people; it is not reserved just for mystics.¹¹² For those who are open to God's presence, the minimal omnipresence of God becomes significant presence in love; and this presence brings consolation with it.¹¹³

In fact, Aquinas thinks that, for sufferers who are open to God's presence, the consolation of that presence is felt with increased intensity in direct proportion to their sufferings. At the start of his commentary on 1 Thessalonians Aquinas quotes with approval the line in 2 Corinthians which says that, "as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ" (2 Cor. 1: 5). This is not because God is willing to come closer to people who have fulfilled a certain quota of suffering. It is because through suffering a person can become more open to the love of God. Samson's distance from God, his willed loneliness even where human persons are concerned, begins to be overcome in consequence of his appalling suffering. When Samson is willing to be more open to God, God can come closer to Samson, with the consolation that such closeness brings.

It is clear that Aquinas's notion of consolation is not abstract or anemic; rather, it emphasizes the role of significant personal presence in relationship with God. So, for example, Aquinas says:

the ultimate perfection, by which a person is made perfect inwardly, is joy, which stems from the presence of what is loved. Whoever has the love of God, however, already has what he loves, as is said in 1 John 4: 16: 'whoever abides in the love of God abides in God, and God abides in him.' And joy wells up from this.¹¹⁴

Elsewhere, commenting on a text in the epistles of Paul, Aquinas puts the point this way: "When [Paul] says 'the Lord is near,' he points out the cause of joy, because a person rejoices at the nearness of his friend."¹¹⁵

Moreover, on Aquinas's views, the joy that comes from the experience of God's presence to a human person is essential to the religious life of a believer; and Aquinas expects that all persons of faith will have such joy.¹¹⁶ As Aquinas puts it, without the joy of this relationship, no progress is possible for anyone in the life of faith.¹¹⁷

Someone might object that suffering interferes with the joy of loving relations, in all the different ways we could trouble to spell out, and that Aquinas simply fails to appreciate this point. I want to concede what seems to be a presupposition of this objection: loving relationship even with the deity does not prevent or take away

suffering, as Aquinas himself recognizes.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, however, Aquinas would reject the objection itself. Aquinas thinks that no sort of suffering, not even pain, can destroy the good of the loving personal relationship between God and a human being open to God's presence.¹¹⁹

I will have it pointed out to me also that there are well-known cases in which a sufferer complains bitterly of the absence of God. Sometimes the complaint that God is absent is simply a poignant way of calling attention to the suffering itself and to the fact that God did not prevent the suffering. So understood, the complaint is a passionate expression of the problem of suffering, but it has nothing to do with the availability of religious consolation. On the other hand, there are cases where the apparent lack of any sense of the presence of God is itself part of the suffering. Abraham endured long periods of deep disappointment without contact with God; Mary thought Jesus had neglected or forgotten her. Samson lost his connection to God and the strength it brought him in his hour of most need. And a central ingredient of Job's suffering was his experience of God as absent. Of course, Abraham and Mary do eventually receive such consolation. God returns to Samson, to empower him as God did on the earlier occasions when God's spirit rushed into Samson. And one of the longest speeches attributed to God in the Bible is the speech God makes to Job. When God's speech is finished, Job says: "I had heard of you before with the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."¹²⁰ In the end, none of these sufferers could truly be said to suffer entirely without the consolation of God's presence.

Nonetheless, at least since the time of John of the Cross, the Christian tradition has recognized what John of the Cross called 'the dark night of the soul.' This phrase refers to a condition in which the consoling feeling typically brought about by experience of the presence and love of God is truly blocked for a person of faith.¹²¹ The obstacle to such consolation is not some internal religious or moral dysfunction on the sufferer's part. Rather, as it is traditionally understood, the deprivation of this consolation is brought about by God for those who are already the most close to him, as a kind of intense training for those capable of the greatest union with him. Recently, this condition has been made the subject of considerable discussion because of the revelation that Mother Teresa suffered from it until her death.¹²² Mother Teresa herself came to see the absence of spiritual consolation in her life as a special gift of God's to her, enabling her to grow powerfully in closeness to God. Why she would think so, however, or why the deprivation of consolation should be thought to have such an effect is a complicated story, which cannot be addressed in passing here; and so I note it only to leave it to one side.

For my purposes here, then, cases of the spiritually advanced who suffer the dark night of the soul have to be recognized as an exception to the claim that consolation increases with affliction. But, with the exception of such complicated cases, the consolation that accompanies suffering for those who are open to it, the shared attention with God and closeness to God, is available to all sufferers and is part of the benefit for those sufferers who are willing to receive it, on Aquinas's views.

Aquinas's theodicy and the mysteriousness of suffering

This, then, is the heart of Aquinas's theodicy. As I hope is clear, it is not to be confused with more pedestrian positions in its neighborhood. The goal of the redemptive processes of justification and sanctification is not growth in some non-relational inner state such as virtue, for example. The goal is the establishment and deepening of a relationship of love between two persons, one human and one divine. For Aquinas, redemption and glory, like consolation itself, are a function of relationship and can be had only in relationship.

In Chapter 1, I argued that, revelation on God's part aside, suffering is opaque; there is no transparency as regards flourishing or one's heart's desires. While Samson is engaged in his shabby affair with Delilah, he is not aware of the loss of that flourishing which he himself desires. In his odious condition, he thinks of himself as flourishing, as successful because of his physical strength. The same opacity attaches to the benefits that can defeat suffering. In the period when Mary was sure she had irretrievably lost her brother and the love of Jesus, which she wanted as much as she wanted her brother, Jesus in great love for her was preparing to restore her brother to her. So it is not the case that one has a benefit that defeats suffering if and only if one knows that one has it. A fortiori, others may also fail to see it. As I explained in that earlier chapter, on Aquinas's views so-called skeptical theism is false:¹²³ *we are* in a position to know what God's reasons are for allowing suffering—but only in general, in theory. For any *particular* case of suffering, because of the opacity of suffering and the opacity of the benefits defeating suffering, by means of unaided human reason a human person will typically not be in a position to know what justifies God in permitting *that* suffering.

The epistemic problem for Aquinas is not the inscrutability of God's mind (as some proponents of skeptical theism allege) but the inscrutability of the human heart and the complexity of a human life. In explaining why some things are not known to some people, for example, Aquinas says: "[one reason why something is not known is that] it is obscured by being inside something [else]. The things most obscured in this way are the things hidden in the [human] heart, which is exceedingly deep and unfathomable."¹²⁴

What requires healing about a particular person, what suffering there is in the life of that person, what role suffering plays or might play in that person's redemption and glory—all these are things that no human being, including the sufferer, may be in a position to know. The role of any particular case of suffering in bringing about the things any particular person cares about can be evident only to a person in a position to see more than human persons typically can see. Furthermore, as the story of Samson makes clear, it is possible even for a person far from flourishing and internal integration around the good to turn toward it in inward ways at the very moment of death, in a manner not visible to external observers. Without the narrative's presentation of Samson's inner thoughts and words, to onlookers it could have seemed as if Samson

had died just as alienated from himself and God as he had been during the latter part of his life.

And so, although Aquinas supposes that there is available to human beings a good and acceptable theodicy, it remains the case that, on his views, any particular instance of suffering is likely to remain a mystery to us. A theodicy, as Aquinas understands it, cannot by itself give a specific answer to the question why some particular person was hit by a car.¹²⁵ At least partly for this reason, the narratives canvassed in the preceding section have an advantage over real-life cases. The narratives give us details about the lives of the sufferers that we ordinarily would not have; and they also show us God in interaction with those sufferers, thereby giving us more insight into the relations between God and the sufferers than even religious believers would suppose is ordinarily possible in real-life cases, absent revelation from God.

It should also be said here that, in the same way and for analogous reasons, Aquinas's theodicy cannot give a specific answer to questions about the suffering of whole societies. If we want to know, for example, what reasons Aquinas's theodicy can give for God's allowing the suffering of the Western world during the First World War, what benefits in particular defeated the great communal suffering elicited by that social convulsion, then it is important to recognize that, on Aquinas's account, we are not in a position to give an answer to the question.

For Aquinas, such an answer would have to fall within the general outlines of his theodicy. That is, the benefits would have to go primarily to the sufferers, as measured by Aquinas's scale of value for human flourishing. Because the question asks about the communal suffering of many nations taken together, however, the benefit would have to be commensurate in scope and size. That is, the benefit would have to affect many societies, and it would also have to impact each society as a whole, influencing the entire community in such a way as to ward off the worst thing for the community or to contribute to the best thing for the community. Only someone in a position to be aware of the trajectory of whole societies could propose a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering of this magnitude, but it is clear that human beings are very rarely in a position to grasp things of this sort. And so, although, on Aquinas's theodicy, there is no answer to the question about suffering affecting whole societies, we can see that we are rarely if ever able to see the things about such extensive organizations of people that we would have to see in order to apply Aquinas's theodicy to suffering on that scale.

All these conclusions apply only to unaided human reason, however. For those in union with God—to some very limited extent in this life and wholly in the afterlife—through their connection to the mind of God, the nature of their suffering and the benefits justifying it will be clear and comprehensible. It is no part of Aquinas's theodicy that suffering and its justifying benefits are opaque in every case or will *always* be opaque. On the contrary, one of the benefits of union with God is the resulting clarity about human lives, one's own, as well as that of others. The trajectory and flourishing of human communities is included in that vision as well.

A question and a brief answer

At this point, it may well occur to someone to wonder why, if Aquinas's theodicy is correct and if God can reveal the explanation for suffering to those united to him, at least in heaven if not also on earth, God does not make such a revelation in this life to everyone who suffers, in order to diminish their suffering.

Now in one sense this question is foolish. Aquinas develops his theodicy on the basis of passages from biblical texts, and he takes the Bible to be the revealed word of God. So Aquinas would undoubtedly suppose that God has in fact explained to human persons what God's purposes are in allowing human beings to suffer. But, in another sense, even with this response to the question, there remains something in the question worth thinking about. That is because, even if it were true that authoritative biblical texts provide a clear and definitive theodicy (something that many people who accept biblical texts as revealed would certainly deny), the theodicy in question is only general. It is theological, not personal, we might say. And so the question that looks foolish at first glance might be rephrased in this way: why does God not explain in detail and in advance to every sufferer why God allows that particular suffering for that particular person?

This is *not* a foolish question, but it has also been answered, in effect, in the course of the examination of the narratives in the preceding section. The very thing that justifies God in allowing the suffering of Job, or that justifies Jesus in allowing the suffering of Mary, would be lost if there were such advance notice and detailed explanation. In the case of Abraham, explanation in advance would undermine or destroy the process designed for the development of trust. In the case of Samson, if God had told Samson in advance that God was going to leave him, Samson would have avoided his capture by the Philistines; and then there would not have been any of the rest of the story that eventuates in Samson's final flourishing, in his being what he himself wanted to be.

The answer to the non-foolish question is, therefore, that, in different ways, for different reasons, God's explaining in advance to particular sufferers his reasons for allowing their particular suffering abrogates those very reasons. God cannot explain his reasons without losing them. And so the reasons that justify God's allowing human suffering are also the reasons that justify God's failing to explain those reasons to the sufferer. The benefits that, on Aquinas's theodicy, come to the sufferer are benefits defeating even the suffering of the hiddenness of God's reasons for allowing particular individuals to suffer as they do.

Aquinas's theodicy and the problem of callousness

For many people, the reaction to this Thomistic theodicy will be indignation. If it is taken not as piously platitudinous but as a serious expression of other-worldliness, some contemporaries are likely to find it so alien to their own sensitivities that they reject it

out of hand as outrageous. One articulate formulation of this reaction is the charge that Aquinas's position is callous, because it finds a value in suffering and therefore seems somehow to make suffering acceptable. The most common expression of this charge consists in picking some horrendous case of suffering, typically drawn from newspapers or novels, and then asking with moral scorn if anything whatever could possibly justify suffering so terrible or so cruel.

But it is important to see that, on Aquinas's views, the typical presentation of cases of suffering in morally scornful objections to theodicy is incomplete. That is because, in such a presentation, the suffering at issue is typically reported from the outside, as it were; the mere facts of the bodily or psychological suffering constitute the whole description of the case. As the narratives in the preceding section make clear, however, in each such case there will also be a larger story, which the objector is in no position to describe, about the role of the suffering in the long-term psychic life of the sufferer. If we had only the newspaper version of the life of Samson, for example, no doubt his story would look very different to us.

In addition, even apart from the issue of incompleteness, the objector's description of the case, offered in moral outrage as a challenge to theodicy, would seem to Aquinas misleading at best and mistaken at worst. That is because typically such a description implies that the sufferer is isolated in his suffering, or at least is isolated from God. But Aquinas would not accept such an implication. As I explained above, on Aquinas's views, to one degree or another God is always present to every sufferer. No sufferer is isolated from the love of omnipresent God; and to the extent to which the sufferer is open to it, the presence of God to that sufferer comes with shared attention and closeness, for the consolation of the sufferer.¹²⁶ The stories in the preceding section are marked by a struggle for trust in God on the part of the protagonists of the stories, but they also include a depiction of the consolation for the sufferer in the presence of God, which at some point in the narrative is also part of the experience of the sufferer.

Someone might suppose that the consolation of second-personal connection to God is available only to sufferers who are religious believers, but this would be a hasty supposition. To see the point, consider the case of Cory Friedman, who suffered horribly with Tourette's syndrome from early childhood until early adulthood. At a certain moment in his life, in consequence of a set of traumatic events, Cory reached a point of no return, after which he began a heroic struggle to regain control of his life. As he describes himself and his family, none of them was a religious believer. And yet this is what Cory wrote on a yellow pad, on the night that marked the beginning of the struggle leading to a new life for him:

I was born with the worst disease.
My body wants me to suffer.
My whole life, I've been gasping for air.
The ground hasn't been there.

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I've lost the world. I've lost the world.
I'm in myself and can't get out.
The world's joy makes me feel like an outcast.

But I am alive. I am alive.
I still have human feelings and needs.
I have dreams.
Don't desert me any longer, common goodness.
How can you?

You've already committed the biggest sin imaginable. Taking a good-hearted,
peaceful, intelligent person and making him come within a millimeter
of taking his own life . . .¹²⁷

These words of this heartbroken, long-suffering atheistic young man are more than a little reminiscent of Job's complaints to God. When Cory cries to "common goodness" not to desert him, when he accuses common goodness of having hurt him enough, to whom is this cry and this charge addressed? Who is the referent of 'you'? Because Cory is atheistic, he himself will not take "God" to be the answer to these questions. And yet who does Cory think could be responsible for what Cory accuses common goodness of doing to him except the God Cory thinks he does not believe in? However we are to understand Cory's complicated psychic state at this point in his life, it is evident that Cory finds the bedrock on which to stand, to take the steps he does toward a regeneration of himself, in second-personal connection with what is from his point of view *je ne sais quoi*. It is therefore at least not clear that any kind of consolation of the presence of God is available only to those who believe it is available.

In a somewhat different vein but also connected to the issue of callousness, a complaint will arise that Aquinas's theodicy gives the wrong result as regards our attitude toward suffering. For example, someone will complain that on Aquinas's theodicy we ought to praise those who afflict other people because the moral wrongdoers are helping their victims to redemption or to glory. On this complaint against his theodicy, Aquinas is stuck with recognizing the Philistines as the heroes of Samson's story. But this complaint rests on a confusion. Someone who perpetrates an injustice against someone else does not do so in order to benefit that person. On the contrary, there is every reason to suppose that, if the Philistines knew that their actions would result in benefits for Samson, they would not have engaged in those actions. So, although a perpetrator of an injustice might without knowing it be bringing about some good for his victim, no praise accrues to the perpetrator from that fact. Rather, he is culpable for the injustice of his action and the malice with which it was done.

Along the same lines, someone might complain that on Aquinas's views we ought never to try to alleviate suffering since to alleviate suffering would also be to prevent the benefit brought about by the suffering.¹²⁸ On this complaint, Aquinas is stuck with censuring Martha for helping her sister Mary to the good of reconciliation with Jesus, since the suffering of Mary's alienation from Jesus is good for Mary. And, of course, if we interpret Aquinas's theodicy as holding, in general, that suffering is a good thing,

then his view will be worthy not only of vituperation but of ridicule as well. It would then turn out, for example, that on his views anesthetics are to be eschewed¹²⁹ or, more generally, that any attempt to palliate or end anyone's pain is a bad thing. And it is certainly incontestable that other-worldliness *has* in the past been used in abominable ways as a basis for exploiting and oppressing the poor and defenseless. When the labor movement in the USA was trying to protect workers through unionization, part of its strategy was to cast opprobrium on hope in an afterlife. Instead of offering decent conditions and fair wages, union organizers said, the exploitative bosses held out to their workers the hope of "pie in the sky when we die."

But this complaint rests on a confusion analogous to that underlying the immediately preceding complaint. On Aquinas's views, *ceteris paribus*,¹³⁰ one person Paula's allowing some suffering on the part of another person Jerome that Paula could readily prevent or relieve is morally permissible only if Paula is justified in holding the true belief that that suffering is the best means in the circumstances for drawing Jerome closer to God in the processes of justification or sanctification. Unless it is true that this suffering of Jerome's serves this purpose, and Paula is justified in believing that it does, then *ceteris paribus* Paula's permitting this suffering of Jerome's is not morally permissible. But, as I have been at pains to show, neither suffering nor the benefits defeating suffering are transparent. It is not true that a person has them if and only if he knows that he does.¹³¹ A fortiori, they are opaque to outside observers. In fact, unlike omniscient God, human beings are rarely in a position to see into the inner life of another person enough to know whether any particular suffering is likely to serve the purpose of justification or sanctification. And so it is also true that one human being Paula is rarely in a position to be morally justified in permitting the suffering of another human being Jerome when, *ceteris paribus*, Paula could readily prevent or relieve Jerome's suffering.

The putative objector might rejoin here that the possession of a Thomistic theodicy in effect provides what one might otherwise not have—namely, the basis for concluding that any particular suffering will in fact serve the purpose of justification and sanctification. The theodicy gives what unaided human reason cannot. And so, the putative objector will claim, a Thomistic theodicy provides what I have just claimed human beings rarely have: moral justification for permitting the suffering of others.

But this rejoinder is also confused. On Aquinas's theodicy, any particular suffering *allowed by God* will benefit the sufferer in the ways the theodicy explains. But when Paula considers whether she ought to try to prevent or relieve Jerome's suffering, she cannot know whether the future suffering of Jerome that she is considering is suffering that God will allow. That is because, if Paula does not do what she can to alleviate that future suffering of Jerome's, someone else might do so. In the biblical book of Esther, when Mordecai is trying to persuade Esther to speak to the King to try to prevent the genocide of the Jews officially proclaimed by the King, Mordecai says to Esther: "if you altogether hold your peace at this time [and do not speak to the King], then enlargement and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place; but you and your father's house will be destroyed."¹³² As this speech indicates, Mordecai is assuming that God

has multiple routes to the end of preventing the suffering of the Jews. If Esther does not contribute to the prevention of that suffering, Mordecai supposes, someone else will. That suffering of the Jews therefore will not be among the sufferings allowed by God, even if Esther fails to try to prevent it; and Esther will be punished by God (Mordecai thinks) for her morally wrong action of not trying to prevent that suffering herself. Analogously, when Paula considers alleviating some future suffering for Jerome, she is not at that time in a position to know whether that suffering is suffering allowed by God. Furthermore, even if it were to be the case that God did allow Jerome's suffering, Paula would not thereby be retrospectively justified in having failed to try to prevent it. Since at the time she failed to try to prevent it, she did not know it would be allowed by God, her failure to try to prevent it is not justified for her.¹³³

Therefore, although God is in an epistemic position to be justified if he allows suffering he could prevent, a human person very generally is not. From the fact that there is a morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering, it does not follow that this reason also gives a human person moral license to allow suffering. Because God and human persons are not in the same epistemic condition as regards the permission or production of suffering, different moral judgments apply to God and human beings on this score. So the cynical use of other-worldly rhetoric receives no validation from Aquinas's position. Oppression of the poor by the rich is an injustice whose evil is in no way mitigated by any consideration of God's reasons for allowing suffering.

Finally, in a related vein, someone might object that, on Aquinas's theodicy, if a human person tries to alleviate suffering, he interferes with God's purposes as regards the role of suffering in the life of the sufferer. On this objection, Aquinas is stuck with disapproving of the attempt by Martha and Mary to get help for their brother when he was sick, because the suffering of his sickness was part of God's plan for good for Lazarus. But this objection is clearly mistaken. Mary and Martha do not defeat God's plan for Lazarus by seeking healing for Lazarus in his sickness. They are just unsuccessful in their efforts. An omnipotent God who has the power to prevent or allow suffering also has control over attempts to alleviate suffering. If God's purposes as regards the life of a sufferer would be thwarted by the alleviation of that person's suffering, then God could bring it about that attempts to alleviate the suffering were unsuccessful.

These objections, then, are confused about what Aquinas's theodicy implies. I want to say, however, that I affirm the affect underlying these objections, even if their content should not be conceded. A theodicy (or a defense) is an attempted explanation of God's allowing suffering. But nothing about such an explanation explains suffering away. Suffering remains suffering, and we need to retain our grief over it if we are not to lose our humanity.¹³⁴

A brief word about two possible objections

At this point, it may occur to someone to object that the world as Aquinas understands it is not the best of all possible worlds. On this objection, there is a best of all possible

worlds, and a perfectly good God has an obligation to create or produce it. But this is arguably not the best of all possible worlds. And so, on this objection, even if Aquinas's attempted theodicy is otherwise successful, the problem of suffering simply arises again in a different guise.

It is clear that there are a number of presuppositions underlying this objection, and each of them is controversial at best. There is a considerable philosophical literature discussing the issue of whether there is a best of all possible worlds. There is an equally substantial literature discussing the issue of whether an omnipotent God can unilaterally produce any world that is possible. And, finally, there is also a sizable literature discussing the issue of whether God is obligated to create a best possible world, even if there is one and God can unilaterally produce it. It is not possible to deal with all these issues in passing here. For the record, Aquinas thinks that 'the best of all possible worlds' is ambiguous as between a world that God governs in the best possible way and a world that is best *simpliciter*. Aquinas does think that there is a best possible world in the first sense; he believes that God governs this world in the best possible way. But he does not think that there is a best possible world in the second sense. From his point of view, an angel is a good immaterial creature; there is no limit on the number of angels God could make; and adding an angel to a world makes it better. So in principle for every world, there is a better world containing one more angel. On Aquinas's view, then, there is no best possible world *simpliciter*. For this reason, there is also no obligation for God to create one.¹³⁵

But whether or not this position of Aquinas's is a successful rejoinder to the objection at issue here, the main problem with the objection, in my view, is that it disregards the dialectic of the discussion. The proponent of the argument from evil claims that it is not possible for there to be a world that is like the actual world as regards suffering (and other related empirical facts) and that nonetheless also contains an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God. The challenge posed by the argument from evil is thus to show that there could be such a God in a world like ours. This challenge is met if one can find a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering of the sort the actual world contains. In order to meet this challenge, it is not necessary to show that this is the best of all possible worlds *simpliciter*, even if, contrary to Aquinas's position, there is such a best of all possible worlds.

Something analogous should be said in response to the worry that the doctrines regarding the afterlife render Aquinas's theodicy more improbable than it would otherwise be. The issues involving probability and the problem of suffering are complicated, and I have neither the space nor the desire to engage them here. But this particular objection seems to me also to fail to engage the dialectic of the discussion. A theodicy does not seek to establish the existence of God or to argue for the truth of a particular set of religious beliefs. It seeks only to ward off an attack. The proponent of the argument from evil claims to be able to use the existence of the suffering in this world to show that God does not exist or that a particular set of religious beliefs is false. A theodicy such as Aquinas's is successful if it wards off this attack. To do so, it needs to provide a defensible morally sufficient explanation for God's allowing evil of the sort

we find in this world. It is not meant to demonstrate the truth of religious claims, and it does not need to do so to succeed as a theodicy.

Conclusion

At the start of this chapter, I listed the sufferings of the protagonists in the biblical narratives examined in the preceding section, and I asked how anyone could justify God's allowing such suffering. The answer, on Aquinas's theodicy, is that this appalling suffering is the best or only means in the circumstances for the sufferer to have what he himself cares about.

In Samson's story, what Samson endures in the last, worst suffering of his life is unquestionably horrific. He is blind, defeated, captured by his enemies, exiled from home, and at a great distance from the God who once was so intimate with him. What is left to him of flourishing or heart's desire? And yet, if we think in terms of what Samson cares about, as the narrative shows it to us—Samson's relationship to God, his mission from God, his gift from God of great physical strength and the victory over the Philistines that strength wins him—it seems in the story that Samson has brought home to him both flourishing and heart's desire precisely by means of his suffering. Without Samson's suffering, by the time of his affair with Delilah what is left to Samson, what is left of Samson, is pathetic. On Aquinas's theodicy, through Samson's suffering, in the circumstances of Samson's life and choices, Samson has what he himself cares more about than the avoidance of that suffering. And that is why, on Aquinas's views, God is justified in letting Samson suffer these things. For Aquinas, *mutatis mutandis*, the same point would apply also to Mary of Bethany, Abraham, and Job. And it is not hard to see why Aquinas would think so. If we were in a position to ask these protagonists whether at the end of the stories, through suffering and because of it, they had what they themselves cared about enough to trade their suffering for it, Aquinas expects that the answer the protagonists would give would be 'yes.'

Aquinas thinks so because he is focused on human flourishing in relationship with God as the highest human good. And there is something intuitively right about interpretations of the stories that are seen through that lens. The sufferings of Mary of Bethany, for example, are appalling. And yet her endurance of that suffering makes her so much greater a soul than Simon the Pharisee, who disdains her at the start of the story. It is better to be Mary of Bethany, even with her suffering, than to be Simon, who suffers so much less than she does.

Nonetheless, there is also reason to worry about Aquinas's position. That is because it is possible for a person to care more about something that is his heart's desire than about his own flourishing. Aquinas's scale of value for human beings can measure suffering that stems from the loss of what we care about as regards flourishing, but, on the face of it, it gives little or no weight to suffering that has its source in the loss of the desires of the heart. The problem can be seen readily by considering Job's heartbreak over the loss of his children. We can suppose that Job might have been willing to accept his loss

of prosperity, his physical suffering, his pariah status, and his psychological trauma in trade for his flourishing. That is, it might be the case in the story that Job cared more about his flourishing than about avoiding that dreadful suffering. There is also, however, the matter of Job's children. In the stories, in the end Abraham keeps Isaac, and Mary receives her brother again from the dead. But Job's children die; they are gone and do not return to him, at least not in his earthly life. It is entirely reasonable to suppose that, in the story, Job might have cared more about those children of his than about his flourishing.

I do not mean that Job might have wanted to suffer some harm to himself rather than allow harm to come to his children. This might be true, but it is not what I mean. I mean rather that, for Job, having his children with him in the course of his earthly life might be more worth having than his own flourishing. On this hypothetical version of the story of Job, not at all hard to imagine, when Job weighs his flourishing against his having his children with him, he cares more about the latter than the former: he would be willing to trade his flourishing to keep his children. But if this were so, then, it seems, Aquinas's theodicy would have nothing to offer the Job of this hypothetical story.

The relational character of Aquinas's scale of value gives his theodicy great strength, but it also focuses the theodicy on the objective side of what we care about, our own flourishing. As I showed in the first chapter, however, there is in addition a subjective side of what we care about. There are the heart's desires. In its concentration on the importance of union with God, Aquinas's theodicy in effect neglects suffering that needs to be addressed, the suffering generated by the loss of the desires of the heart.

In the next chapter, I will explain and defend this claim and consider how to develop Aquinas's theodicy to take account of it. In the final chapter, I will consider this developed theodicy and evaluate it. There I will argue that it can handle even the hypothetical case of Job and his children.