



## On social evil and natural evil: in conversation with Christopher Southgate

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### Abstract

In this contribution, the author engages in a conversation with Christopher Southgate on the relationship between social evil and what is called natural “evil.” Theologically, this centers around an understanding of creation and fall. It is argued that Southgate typically treats soteriology and eschatology as themes pertaining to an evolutionary theodicy, whereas an adequate ecotheology would discuss the problem of natural suffering under the rubric of the narrative of God’s economy. The question is then how that story is best told.

### To start a conversation

In November 2008 (or thereabouts), Christopher Southgate came to New York City for a poetry event. He was invited by Wentzel van Huyssteen to visit his postgraduate seminar at Princeton Theological Seminary to discuss with the students *The Groaning of Creation* that had been published earlier that year. I was a fellow at the Center for Theological Inquiry at the time and also attended that seminar. In the discussion, I made a little list of various root causes of (human) suffering (see below) and asked Southgate which of these should be regarded as primary. If suffering manifests itself as symptom at the surface level, how can the underlying problem be diagnosed? What, then, should be the main target to be addressed by the Christian message of salvation in Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit? Here is the list (as I polished it up later —see Conradie 2013b, 19–20):

1. The recognition of the role played by randomness and contingency in a world that is less perfectly Platonic than some may have wished?
2. Entropy and the arrow of time implying the transience of everything in the universe (including stars, planets, continents, mountains, rivers, species, and living organisms)? The destructive forces of gravity?
3. The pre-programmed limited life cycle of multicellular organisms and their cells (planned obsolescence)?
4. The very basis of biological functioning in terms of living organisms absorbing inorganic materials (for humans: eating organic leftovers such as seeds, fruits, and nuts)?
5. Eating living organic material (plants)? Eating other living organisms (meat)? (see Conradie 2016)
6. Illness, faltering health, aging, degeneration, and the decay of possibilities?

7. The eventual mortality of every form of life but also of species?
8. The contingency, dead ends, chaotic and experimental nature, and incredible wastefulness of evolutionary drivers?
9. Pain impulses (which is an evolutionary advantage)? The suffering endured by sentient animals?
10. Anxieties over the possibility of future suffering among the “higher” mammals?
11. Killing for food? Parasites living from other living organisms? Excessive violence, brutality, and “torture” between nonhuman species?
12. The destructive presence of humans in ecosystems (only)? Is nature *only* to be redeemed from anthropogenic destruction? How does the emergence of human sin relate to the other factors mentioned above? Is it the almost inevitable result of an anxiety over human finitude?

As I remember it, Southgate responded by agreeing with me that anthropogenic suffering (the last on the list) is indeed the main problem that has to be addressed, although he added that the relationship between animal brutality and human sin would need to be further explored. His answer made good sense given his contributions to Christian ecotheology where the focus is clearly on anthropogenic ecological destruction. However, the preface of *The Groaning of Creation* includes a parable on animal brutality (the second last on the list) with reference to orcas hunting near Vancouver Island. But how are these two levels of the root causes of suffering related to each other? In a word: what is the relation between what is usually termed natural “evil” and social evil? Is social evil (wrongdoing in one species) perhaps merely one manifestation of natural evil?

This is of course a loaded question, one that illustrates deep divides in contemporary Christian theology. In liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, Mujerista theology, Minjung theology, Dalit theology, ecotheology, animal theology and a range of indigenous theologies the focus is clearly on social evil (economic inequality, white supremacy, oppression, patriarchy, colonization, hierarchies of class and caste, anthropogenic climate change, cruelty to animals, and so on). The focus on the intellectual problem of natural evil found elsewhere (especially in the North Atlantic context), is treated with some suspicion as the esoteric interest of those who can afford to worry about that.

Put differently: while some focus on problems pertaining to God’s “very good” creation, others focus on the palpable need for salvation (or liberation). How, then, is God’s work of creation related to God’s work of salvation and consummation? Although some discuss social evil in the context of the theodicy problem as a logical or philosophical problem, others treat it as a soteriological problem—or often merely as an ethical, a pastoral or a practical problem (how to cope with suffering derived from evil; see Southgate and Robinson 2007, 78). Even where the focus is on the theodicy problem (“the task of affirming the righteousness of God in the face of the existence of evil”; Southgate and Robinson 2007, 67), the focus can be on social evil (injustices and oppression calling for liberation) or on natural evil (suffering derived from creation itself).

Christopher Southgate's oeuvre is remarkable since he is clearly deeply concerned about both natural evil *and* social evil. These two concerns meet in the context of his contributions to ecotheology, a field in which we have worked closely together within the Christian Faith and the Earth project (see Conradie 2012; Conradie et al. 2014) and the Exeter project on ecological hermeneutics (see Horrell et al. 2010). These concerns are expressed more profoundly in his collections of poetry (which I will not explore here).

In this contribution I will focus on the way Southgate understands the relationship between natural evil and social evil in a selection of his recent texts. I will pay him the respect due to a friend and long-standing conversation partner, namely to listen carefully, to ask critical questions, and to continue the conversation because the compelling subject matter (the underlying questions) has precedence over any individual opinions.

### **To sin or not to sin: is that the question?**

What is the relationship between social evil and natural "evil" (the latter in my view a misnomer because no human agency is involved)? This question needs some "precisioning." Let me offer three possible ways of framing the question from within Christian theology in order to explore the second and third in more detail below.

One may approach this question from the perspective of specific cases of suffering. One may identify at least five such sources of suffering (see Conradie 2005). The first of these is suffering resulting from a range of natural causes (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, predation, degeneration, dying, death), sometimes referred to as natural "evil." Such suffering would be there irrespective of the presence of humans in ecosystems although the suffering may be greatly exacerbated by human folly or evil intent (e.g., the actual impact of tsunamis; Southgate 2014a, 799). Then there is suffering resulting from pure contingency: being in the wrong place at the right time (e.g., road "accidents," forest fires resulting from lightning). The other three result from social evil: suffering as a result of one's own sins (guilt, remorse, self-injury, bad habits, being justly punished), being sinned against (gossip, insults, assault, rape, murder), and structural violence (ideologies such as imperialism, racism, sexism that become embedded in social structures).

To these five main sources of suffering one may add heroic self-sacrifice, vicarious representation, and divine (dis)election. It is pastorally both necessary and dangerous to distinguish between such sources of suffering. In cases of the death of a child from cancer, an accident, or suicide, a distinction is clearly necessary. In contrast, to discern the causes of death in the case of HIV/AIDS may simply add to the stigma, especially in cases where a woman who has been faithful to her partner contracts the disease because the partner has been unfaithful.

Another way of framing the question is whether human sin is the necessary or more or less inevitable result of anxiety over natural suffering, or if suffering is the result of sin. Both positions are clearly untenable. To suggest that biological death is the result of sin makes little sense in terms of what we know of evolutionary history, as Southgate argues. To treat social evil merely as a symptom of underlying natural causes is to thwart the need for moral pedagogy, jurisprudence, and policy making (see Conradie 2017). A therapeutic response to evil where

perpetrators are treated merely as victims cannot suffice as there is a need in human communities for adults to take moral responsibility for their own actions. To recognize that both extremes are untenable implies the need for theological reflection on the origins of evil—albeit that talking about evil may well exacerbate evil, while any attempt to explain the origin of evil, to comprehend sin, to find a place for sin within a meaningful whole, is spiritually a temptation to justify ourselves. In the discussion below I will return to the diverging answers regarding the roots of what is usually called natural “evil” and social evil.

A third way of approaching the question is to commence with the Christian message of salvation. The question is then whether this message is primarily aimed at overcoming suffering from natural causes or human-induced suffering or both. In ecotheology, there is little doubt that the message of salvation extends to the whole of creation, including other animals, but the underlying problem remains anthropogenic ecological destruction. But how is such salvation related to God’s beloved creation if such suffering is necessarily embedded in an evolving creation? This question is addressed in Christian soteriology and especially eschatology. As I have argued elsewhere (Conradie 2015, 272–87), there are diverging theological positions here that can be classified in terms of key words such as restoration (the classic Reformed position), elevation (the classic Catholic and Eastern Orthodox position), replacement (the Anabaptist option), or endless recycling (a liberal/process position). Each of these approaches is seriously flawed, but as far as I can see there are no alternatives available (yet). I think Christopher Southgate would emphasize elevation (recognizing the need to address natural suffering), even hoping for a “pelican heaven” (2008b, 82–91), while I have defended the need for restoration (prioritizing the need to address social evil) despite its evident inadequacy in recognizing evolutionary history (Conradie 2013b, 2015). In short, theologians tell the story of God’s work from creation to eschatological consummation in rather different ways.

### **What went wrong?**

Southgate opens the discussion in *The Groaning of Creation* with the tension between the (from an evolutionary perspective) counterintuitive Christian affirmation of the goodness of creation (see Conradie 2013a) and the recognition that nature is “clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horridly cruel” (Southgate 2008b, 2). His argument is that creation is both good and groaning (with reference to Romans 8:22). If so, why is creation groaning in “travail”—due to natural evil or to social evil or both? How is the Greek term  $\phi\thetaορ\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$  in Romans 8:21 to be interpreted? (see Southgate 2008b, 92–97). In ecotheology, such “groaning” is usually associated with anthropogenic destruction, but the primary problem addressed in *The Groaning of Creation* is the harder one of natural pain (for sentient forms of life), suffering (arguably for animals with consciousness), and anxiety (for animals with self-consciousness). This, Southgate argues, is a problem recognized in Darwin’s time but often underplayed in the twentieth century due to the massive human suffering induced by other humans. He is acutely aware that such natural suffering forms a necessary part of life and of evolution and that this challenges the belief in a benevolent Creator. The main problem is not so much pain (a necessary concomitant of sentient life) or death (a thermodynamic necessity), or the loss of non-living entities (through change), but that many (most) living creatures seem to be the casualties of evolution in the sense that they die prematurely so that their lives are all

suffering and no richness or joy (2008b, 40). (Note that this answer is not quite the same as the one given above in response to my question to him.) The focus of *The Groaning of Creation* is indeed on natural suffering and this work should be understood as a contribution to an evolutionary theodicy, albeit that the chapter on “The Call to Humanity” (2008b, 92–115) also recognizes anthropogenic ecological destruction.

To his credit, Southgate resists anthropocentric solutions to this problem that regard animal suffering as the price being exacted from other animals for the sake of the emergence of human consciousness and freedom (2008b, 43). This would sacrifice the victims of evolutionary history for the sake of some future (human) telos. Yet, he opts for a teleological scheme as well, albeit a more inclusive one, namely that the life forms found in the biosphere required an evolutionary process extending backwards into deep time. This “strongly teleological” scheme opts for “the value of every creature both as a good in itself and as a vital component of an ecosystem” (2008b, 71), but also prizes the propensities towards increasing complexity and levels of consciousness. His main argument, following what he calls a good–harm analysis, is an “only way argument” (or better: the “best” possible way) that he captures (and italicizes) as follows:

I hold that the sort of universe we have, in which complexity emerges in a process governed by thermodynamic necessity and Darwinian natural selection, and therefore by death, pain, predation, and self-assertion, is the *only* sort of universe that could give rise to the range, beauty, complexity, and diversity of creatures the Earth has produced. (Southgate 2008b, 29)

In many of his recent writings, Southgate reiterates the point that value and disvalue are integral parts of the same evolutionary process: “it is the same process—evolution driven at least in part by natural selection— that gives rise to both the values of beauty, diversity, and ingenuity in creation, and to the disvalues of suffering and extinction. Further, it is the same processes that cause so much ‘natural evil’ experienced by humans— earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, and typhoons— that made the world so extravagantly fruitful for life” (2014a, 785). This is a seminal insight that guides his thinking on evolution and where things have gone wrong.

In an important section of a chapter on “Roads Not Taken,” Southgate opts to do without a fall from paradise (2008b, 28–35). He fully acknowledges the role and impact of human sin in the form of blame, envy, and violence (2008b, 28). He also acknowledges that humans are fallen creatures who will never find their place on this planet unless they find their home with and in the love of God (2008b, 100). This failure has obvious environmental consequences for a “groaning” creation. However, he rejects the Augustinian idea that the world was created free from struggle, predation, parasitism, and violence and that it was subsequently corrupted by human rebellion. There was no paradise on Earth and hence no fall from paradise, neither a cosmic fall, nor a human fall. He refuses to blame aspects of the world that are difficult to reconcile with the goodness of the Creator (miscarriages,

tsunamis, predation) on the results of a human, angelic, or cosmic fall. The Creator has to accept responsibility for such aspects.

Southgate's intentions are clear, namely to confront the challenge posed by evolutionary biology as honestly and bravely as possible while maintaining the belief in God as Creator *and* Savior. To do so, he cannot let God off the hook by putting the blame elsewhere. He also cannot allow an ontological dualism, separating some distorted elements in creation from other good ones whenever the going gets rough (2008b, 32). Southgate regards it as "a common Christian mistake to dissect out what we love about life and attribute it to God, and then to take the uglier bits and attribute them to Satan" (2015, 246–47). Instead, he acknowledges what is unpalatable to many: It was presumably God who created the suffering in evolution (2015, 246). In short, evil is not a privation of the good, but a necessary concomitant of the creation of the good: "the same processes that lead to the refinement of creaturely characteristics also lead to suffering and extinction" (2015, 247).

This is an important move for understanding the relationship between natural suffering and social evil. If natural suffering is not the result of human sin (which is clearly the case, although such suffering may be exacerbated by sin), is human sin then the result of anxieties born from struggle, parasitism, and predation? Southgate seems to agree that "our evolutionary inheritance makes it utterly unsurprising that we are creatures prone to violent and greedy self-assertion, yet it is what has made us the animals we are with all the possibilities for goodness that entails" (2008b, 35). In this way, he can affirm a state of fallenness while doing away with an historical fall, which he argues is simply impossible to sustain (2008a, 251). If humans are fallen without having fallen, how is the story of creation, fall, and redemption then to be told? The added problem, Southgate (2011, 383) observes in a discussion on a Barthian shadow-side to God's otherwise good creation, is that suffering does seem to come before sin in evolutionary history: "But this is the crucial point. Evolutionary history does not begin with the story of sin and the Fall of human beings. It begins with millions of years in which the light and shadow of creation are to be found together, but from which the freely chosen sin that Barth calls a disastrous defeat is absent." How, then, does sin emerge in the first place? I think Southgate thinks that sin is indeed inevitable since it is an extrapolation of the way in which disvalue is intrinsically and necessarily intertwined with the values that the Creator envisaged (2011, 378). He tends to agree with Celia Deane-Drummond (2009, 187) that human fallenness is a "culmination of tendencies already latent in the natural world." Salvation in Jesus Christ therefore has to address not only human fallenness but also the underlying problem that gave rise to such fallenness.

### **How does Southgate tell the story?**

Southgate and his friend Andrew Robinson offer a typology of three versions of the story of God's work given their well-known typology of various theodicies based on what they term a "good–harm analysis." They identify three logical relations between goods and harms. In the property– consequence model, humans possessed the property of freedom, squandered that by falling into total depravity, and therefore need the gift of grace to be rescued from this predicament. In the developmental model, the Fall is understood as "falling upwards," that

is, as part of a necessary learning curve that humans experience in developing towards full maturity and a sense of responsibility (a “soul-making” theodicy). They may be inspired in this process by Christ’s example of God-consciousness and kenotic self-giving. In the constitutive model, human fallenness is regarded as a mystery that is nevertheless the inevitable inverse of the emergence of the good. It suggests that “harm comes to people both by the evil actions of others and by the will of the Lord, and for the furtherance of his glory” (Southgate and Robinson 2007, 81). The theme of God’s glory is one that Southgate has been exploring more recently (see 2014a), but already in a 2002 article he had adopted a developmental theodicy in which he admits that evolution gives rise to goods and that harms may (will) occur in the same process. He augments this not only with divine fellow-suffering (kenosis) and eschatological compensation, but also a role for humans as co-redeemers in the healing of creation (Southgate and Robinson 2007, 88, almost verbatim). For Southgate, God takes creaturely pain into the heart of the Godhead both in creation and in redemption, albeit that he resists seeing creation as cruciform. (2014a, 805)

In an article on God’s glory, Southgate comments in more detail on this three-part story, that he admits “still contains profound elements of tragedy” (2014a, 803):

*Gloria mundi, gloria crucis, gloria in excelsis.* Too often Christian exposition has concentrated only on the second of these stories, paving the way for the third. I suggest that Christianity has sold itself short through inadequate attention to the first story, to protological glory, difficult and troubling concept though we have found this to be. In considering the natural world, the Christian contemplative must look at the whole of the three-act story. That story brings to every entity and event in the drama of creation the perspective that God became incarnate and suffered for the transformation of the world, and that there will be a transformed state of that world in which those creatures that appear victims in the first story know flourishing in the third. (2014a, 800)

In an as yet unpublished essay entitled “‘Free-Process’ and ‘Only Way’ Arguments” (Southgate forthcoming) Southgate offers a fuller account of his version of the narrative in response to the question of why God should have to redeem, or heal, what God has created:

To be wholly consistent, the narrative must run like this: only a Darwinian process full of ambiguity could give rise to a world in which myriad types of creature could flourish, and in which the Logos could be incarnate and atone for the (inevitable) sins of an evolutionary world. That atonement— however understood—makes possible the eschatological phase of God’s work, the “new creation” (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Corinthians 5:17). That phase leads ultimately to a dimension of existence in which there is no more suffering. But we are forced to conclude, if thinking this way, both that the initial ambiguous phase was a necessary preliminary, and also that the post-Cross eschatological phase is at a very early stage.

In what follows below I will rearrange the categories, drawing on my own overview of four ways of telling the Christian story from creation to eschatological consummation (see again Conradie 2015, 272–87).

Given Southgate's option not to follow the route of a fall from paradise, he rejects the version of the Christian story as a U-shaped curve, namely moving from paradise to paradise lost and paradise regained (2008b, 34). This (Augustinian and classically reformed) narrative logic of creation–fall– redemption–consummation suggests that the primary problem is human sin since the goodness of creation (what is material, earthly, and bodily) can be affirmed. This typically assumes that suffering and death is the result of sin. Accordingly, God's providence is understood as God's way of restricting the devastating impact of sin through "common grace" (Kuyper) in order to create the necessary room for the history of salvation. The message of salvation in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit then responds to human sin, namely the alienation between God and humanity that resulted from the Fall. This message of salvation brings reconciliation, healing, and well-being already in this dispensation, but the impact of sin cannot be overcome yet as attempts to eradicate evil completely will yield more evil. The eschatological consummation of all things then has to address the lasting impact of evil through a final victory over the power of evil, including death, through the resurrection of the body and eternal life. In this way eschatological consummation is understood primarily as restoring the integrity of God's original creation, that is as re-creation and not as a new creation that would replace the former dispensation (see Conradie 2013a, b). The eschaton affirms the goodness of the creation.

This version of the story is typically rejected by theologians seeking to take evolutionary history seriously since it cannot recognize the presence of suffering, death, and extinction long before humans emerge. For Southgate, this is the problem that an evolutionary theodicy has to address. As far as I can see there are three main alternatives to this narrative logic.

The latest alternative is to admit that this world and this life is all that we have, that there is no solace for the individual victims of history and that our last best hope is for recycling, that is that life will go on as far as the laws of thermodynamics allow. From this perspective, predation, premature death, and extinction are perhaps tragic but serve the greater good of Life itself. God becomes the Recycler of all things, understood in either an (androcentric?) deist or a (feminist?) pantheist, but often in a rather secular, way with reference to Mother Nature. This narrative does allow for a critique of unnecessary suffering through domination in the name of differences of gender, race, class, and species, leading to injustices and oppression, but such suffering can never be undone. Southgate clearly does not follow this route either since he is concerned over the suffering of individuated creatures that die without an opportunity to flourish. He asks: What difference does God's care make in the experience of the individual non human creature? (Southgate 2014b, 111).

An earlier (classically Anabaptist, perhaps Manichaean) alternative is to hope for an eschatological replacement of the old creation. The old worn out "shoes" will be thrown away and replaced with heavenly ones. The emphasis is then on a new creation (instead of



recreation). The attraction of this narrative logic is that suffering, predation, premature death, and extinction can then be fully recognized as problematic. The hope that these can be finally overcome is kept alive, albeit that such a new creation remains speculative, despite some hints that “a different world is possible.” For Jews and Christians, the Exodus and the resurrection of Christ offer paradigmatic pointers to such a hope. This narrative logic comes at the cost of undermining an affirmation of the goodness of creation. In Platonic schemes, materiality and embodiment become a kind of necessary evil, rather than something primordially affirmed as “good” (Southgate 2014a, 787). Creation is thus inherently flawed and has to be replaced. It begs questions about the continuity between creation and new creation. In the end it is difficult to avoid the impression that the Spirit has to rectify the botched job of the Father. Although he also hopes for an eschatological resolution of the suffering rooted in evolutionary history, Southgate is hardly attracted to this route. He recognizes that this separates the God of creation from the God of redemption and defeats the task of any theodicy (Southgate and Robinson 2007, 83).

The third alternative is the classically Eastern Orthodox and Catholic narrative logic, namely to maintain that grace does not cancel but perfects nature. The narrative logic is one of elevation (or development?) and can draw on Irenaean, Athanasian, or Thomist categories such as theosis, transfiguration, maturation, and perfection. The Fall is then understood as a human failure to mature to our full potential (Southgate 2008b, 110), whereas salvation follows a development path towards humans becoming co-creators, even co-redeemers with God (Southgate 2014b, 114). In this way it is quite possible to affirm the inadequacies of God’s otherwise good creation (for Southgate symbolized by the second Pelican chick’s fate) and to recognize the impact of human sin in the hope that redemption and eschatological consummation will address not only the problem of sin but will also recognize and elevate each creature’s life before God. Southgate is clearly attracted to this narrative logic more than the others.

The danger, though, is that creation and fall will become conflated and treated as co-original, or as alternating features of the human condition. For Southgate, the Fall reflects a general condition rather than a historical (or logical?) chronology (2008b, 102). If so, redemption and consummation then have to overcome not only the (ecological) impact of human sin, but also the inadequacies of God’s otherwise “quite good” creation. Since the message of salvation cannot alleviate natural suffering and death already within evolutionary history, such suffering and premature death can only be overcome eschatologically, that is, beyond history. The eschatological consummation then has to replace, transform, or transfigure protological creaturely existence.

Southgate and others may argue that natural selection, and the suffering embedded in it, is the “only way” for the evolution of life. However, if “another” way is eschatologically possible, why did God as Creator not make use of this way from the beginning? Are God as Creator and God as Redeemer in tension with each other here? This is a question Southgate also raises. Why did God not just create heaven? (2008b, 90). In response, he returns to his argument that evolutionary history is the only way that creaturely selves could emerge; if

you like, how the building blocks used for eschatological consummation could be gathered together. Still, the question remains of how the continuity in God's work is recognized and whether it is not too speculative to assume that protological problems will be overcome eschatologically.

### **The need for a temporal sequence?**

Traditional theologies of restoration assume a temporal sequence from creation to fall to salvation and consummation (sometimes grouped together as redemption). This "step-wise" logic avoids a conflation of creation and fall and thus affirms the goodness of creation so that human sin can be regarded as the primary problem to be addressed by the message of salvation. However, this version of the story can hardly do justice to the problem of natural suffering that an evolutionary theodicy (like Southgate's) seeks to address.

How crucial is such a temporal sequence? If we have to "drop the Fall" (i.e., a historical fall; see Van den Brink 2011), can this sequence be dropped as well? Most attempts to develop an evolutionary theology within the context of ecotheology (as wide apart as those proposed by Hendrikus Berkhof, Denis Edwards, John Haught, Philip Hefner, or Teilhard de Chardin) seem to follow that route by integrating the emergence of the human species with the emergence of social evil. Often (not by Berkhof or Edwards though) being created and being fallen are treated as ahistorical, mythical features of human existence, and thus as co-original. However, such ahistoricity can hardly do justice to evolutionary change or to the particularity of the Christian story as one situated in (human) history. The Christian faith makes no sense other than as telling the story of divine action in history (another topic on which Southgate and I have had numerous conversations). Theology and evolutionary biology cannot be regarded as nonoverlapping magisteria since they seek to interpret the same history. One therefore cannot escape from the need to tell the story, that is to seek a narrative reinterpretation of evolutionary history (see Conradie 2008).

The danger for any evolutionary theology is merging creation and fall so that fallenness is regarded pretty much as the necessary result of natural "evil." At best, there is then a complex interplay between the tragic and the emergence of human responsibility. If so, the Christian message of salvation and especially consummation has to respond to the deeper, underlying problem of natural suffering. Some (like Southgate) would hope for a "new creation" where the suffering of each individual sentient creature will be addressed, whereas others have no such hope for the victims of evolutionary history and therefore focus on alleviating suffering here and now.

I, for one, prefer a sharper distinction between creation and fall in order to emphasize (in the context of ecotheology) that our primary problem is indeed anthropogenic. I also suggest that a historical fall need not be contested in the sense of the inception and spread of social evil. What is contested is whether this is a fall from either "paradise" or from innocence. The deeper question is whether social evil is an inevitable by-product of hominid evolution so that this may also be regarded as a "disvalue" that is inseparable from the "value" of the emergence of symbolic consciousness. If so, the Creator is responsible not only for natural

suffering but also for human sin. Given the soteriological core of the Christian faith, such a monist answer has to be rejected as much as its alternative, namely an ontological dualism that would undermine God's sovereignty. There may well be contextual differences as to where one would see current dangers amongst one's interlocutors in this regard. Southgate is clearly willing to face up to the dangers embedded in monism through his understanding of God's glory which, he argues, is both awe-inspiring and ominous (see 2014a, 799).

In distinguishing creation and fall I seek to "redeem" the category of sin (Conradie 2017). However, this of course does not yet address the problem of natural suffering. We remain deeply indebted to Christopher Southgate for helping us to take this problem seriously and to do so in such a way that God's compassion for each individual creature becomes evident. Put cryptically, I suggest that an adequate ecotheology should treat the theodicy problem under the rubric of soteriology (or better: the narrative of God's householding, i.e., the *οικονομία του εεού* ) instead of discussing soteriology under the rubric of an evolutionary theodicy. I am suspicious of the latter strategy whereas Southgate, I presume, would be suspicious of the former.

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