Evil, Analysis and Narrative

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Resumen

Los filósofos análisticos resuelven problemas usando las herramientas del razonamiento científico. Se argumenta que esta forma de filosofía es superficial por lo cual la respuesta a la existencia del mal ha sido utilizada como evidencia de este argumento. Una de las principales objeciones a los intentos de los filósofos cristianos de responder al mal es que no tratan de consolar a los que sufren. Una apropiada respuesta al mal, respecto a la consolación de las personas, sería una respuesta pastoral adecuada.

En primer lugar, se estudian las respuestas de los filósofos analíticos acerca de la iniquidad. Luego, considero cuál sería una respuesta pastoral adecuada y se sugiere que ciertas formas de narrativa puedan cumplir con esta necesidad. Estoy seguro que, aunque estas narrativas llenan ciertas condiciones, el pastor será culpable por ofrecer un 'falso consuelo'. Concluyo que una de las tareas del filósofo analítico cristiano, es asegurarse que el consuelo ofrecido por pastores sea positivo.

Responding to evil: a test for philosophy

Christians, Jews and Muslims claim that the world is the creation of a being who is infinitely wise, totally powerful and supremely loving - and yet the world contains many horrendous evils. There is clearly a problem here, and monotheistic responses to this problem can be traced back to Old Testament writings such as Genesis and Job. Of course, different generations have been struck by different

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aspects of this problem. St. Augustine, steeped in the writings of Plato, as well as the Christian scriptures and traditions, does not approach the question in the same way as the author of Job. The problem appears different again, and even more acute, for Jewish writers such as Emil Fackenheim, who cannot but write in the shadow of the Holocaust. Philosophers who address the problem of evil may or may not succeed in casting light on the nature of darkness; they will certainly reveal a lot about themselves in the way in which they approach the problem. Given that the existence of evil is, in the opinion of many thinkers, including this author, the most difficult of the challenges which face monotheists, it is hardly surprising that this problem tends to reveal the shortcomings of various ways of doing philosophy.

In this paper, I want to put one particular brand of monotheistic philosophy under the spotlight: Christian analytical philosophy. My reason for focusing on this particular brand of philosophy is that I count myself as a Christian analytical philosopher, and as such, I am faced with the following problem: if Christian analytical philosophy can say nothing worthwhile about the problem of evil, would it not be preferable to seek some other form of Christian philosophy?

What is "analytical philosophy?" Alas, an answer to that question would either be so short that, in the author's opinion, it would mislead readers or else so long that, in the editor's opinion, it would "scare many readers away." The term "analytical philosophy" is hard to define because it is no longer used to describe a single way of doing philosophy. It is used as an umbrella term to cover a wide variety of philosophical approaches that are historically linked - and, in deference to editorial opinion, I will not frighten the more timid readers with a potted history here. However, I should at least explain what it is that makes many thinkers suspicious of analytical philosophy.

Most philosophers who are called "analytical" retain an interest in applying techniques from fields such as logic, mathematics and physics ("hard" sciences, as they are frequently called), to philosophical problems. Although it has become the dominant form of philosophy in many institutions, analytical philosophy has its share of detractors as well. Analytical philosophy is considered by some thinkers to be the product of an English-speaking world that is too much in thrall to the glamour of science. Why should one suppose that all of the important questions of philosophy can be answered by using methods borrowed from natural science? There is a danger that analytical philosophers will either try to answer important questions by using inappropriate techniques, or restrict themselves to answering those relatively trivial questions for which their training equips them, and ignore those deep questions which it is the true vocation of the philosopher to answer or else, worse still, dismiss matters of deep concern as pseudo-questions, to which no answer can be given.

Before considering whether analytical philosophy is guilty as charged, it is necessary to present the reader with some of the evidence that has been used against analytical philosophy. Specifically, it is necessary to survey what analytical philosophers have said in response to the problem of evil.

First, a plea for patience is necessary. Readers who find this survey of analytical philosophy dry and tedious, and find themselves asking "Is this really going to lead to anything worthwhile?" should not give up easily. My aim in this article is to ask precisely this question: "Is this--analytical philosophy of religion--really going to lead to anything worthwhile?" And it is impossible to appreciate why this question is asked, in such despairing tones, without a brief sample of analytical philosophy of religion.

Evil and analytical philosophy: a survey

Analytical philosophers have, to a large extent, inherited their agenda from David Hume, the distinguished 18th Century Scottish philosopher. While it may be strictly inaccurate to describe a philosopher with such a pronounced tendency to doubt any positive statement about the ultimate nature of reality as an atheist, his views are hardly hospitable to Christianity, to say the least. To understand the work of analytical philosophers - Christians and non-Christians - on the problem of evil, it is necessary to understand something of Hume's legacy and challenge.

Hume's goal was to achieve the same kind of scientific progress in the study of the human mind that had already been achieved in the study of planetary motion by Newton. (Hume, 1902, 14)

His hope was that, by studying the capabilities of the human mind, the means by which all human knowledge is acquired, he could map the boundaries of possible human knowledge, thus saving us from the perennial problem of people who claim knowledge about matters that are beyond human understanding. (Hume, 1902, 16) The work of analytical philosophers on the problem of evil can be seen as consisting in footnotes to Hume.

Hume's conclusion was that human knowledge could be divided into two sectors, which he termed "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact." Concerning relations of ideas he says, "Propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe."(Hume, 1902, 25)

Contemporary analytical philosophers speak not of "relations of ideas," but "deductive knowledge." An argument for some proposition is considered to be deductively valid if and only if it is absurd to suppose that the premises are true and

the conclusion false.

It is generally, and, I believe, correctly supposed by philosophers of logic that we can, by "the mere operation of thought" recognize that a certain proposition is an absurdity, and so that it cannot be true - although it remains a matter of controversy precisely what constitutes an absurdity, and why we should have this ability to recognize that such propositions cannot be true. These are truly profound questions, and their resolution lies far beyond the scope of this article.

For the purposes of this paper, I will assume without argument that a logical absurdity is a contradiction. So, it is not a logical absurdity to suppose that pigs fly, or that flowers can talk. Our knowledge that such propositions are false is based on empirical data, i.e. human experience.

It is a logical absurdity to suppose that a circle is square, or that what is a table is not a table, in one and the same sense of "table": we can tell just by thinking about it that these propositions are not true, and cannot be true. An argument, then, is deductively valid if, and only if, someone who asserts the premises but denies the conclusion is guilty of asserting a contradiction.

As well as "relations of ideas," Hume believes that we can have knowledge of "matters of fact". Concerning these, he states,

> The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible; because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if ever conformable to reality. (Hume, 1902, 25)

(How gratifying that Hume agrees with the account of absurdity adopted in this paper!) However, Hume encounters a problem concerning our knowledge of matters of fact. When I state that the Sun will rise tomorrow, or that there will be rain in Nicaragua in July, that is factual knowledge, if it is knowledge at all. My expectation that this has happened in the future is based on the fact that this is what has happened in the past. But why should I suppose that I have the ability to discern in what respects the future will resemble the past? There is, as Hume points out, no argument from relations of ideas - that is, no deductive argument - to justify the belief that I have such an ability. Nor is it any use to say that I have, in the past, been able to predict what will happen based on my past observations. To suppose that because this method has worked in the past it will work in the future is to presuppose the very point that was under discussion:

> For all inferences from experience suppose, as their foundation, that the future will resemble the past, and that similar powers will be conjoined with

> similar sensible qualities. If there be any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference or conclusion. (Hume, 1902, 37-38)

The problem of justifying inference from past cases to future cases is an example of the more general problem of inferring from observed cases to unobserved cases. This problem is known as "the problem of induction," or, in deference to his haunting description of it, "Hume's problem." The solution, if, indeed, there is one, remains a matter of controversy.

There is, at least, broad agreement that there is some means by which we can use observed data as evidence for a proposition whose truth is not known by direct observation. Whereas it is supposed that, with a deductive argument, if the premises are true it is impossible for the conclusion to be false, the standard that is required of an inductive argument is merely that, sufficient evidence of the right kind, it is more likely than not that a certain hypothesis is true.

For example, a student arrives late for class. Her eyes are glazed over, she reacts to the slightest noise with a painful wince, and she smells of beer. All of this is observed data, and it can be used as evidence that strongly supports the hypothesis that she has a hangover.

In practice, it is usually easy to tell whether or not certain evidence supports a given hypothesis, although we might find it somewhat more difficult to explain the general principles that we use to make such a judgement. The attempt to articulate the rules that govern this type of argument belong to the field of enquiry known as "confirmation theory."

So much for Hume's general epistemology; now it remains to consider his discussion of evil. Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, first published in 1779, three years after his death, contains a classic statement of the problem of evil. The discussion follows the pattern set by Hume's epistemology.

Hume uses the term "Natural Religion" to describe attempts to arrive at knowledge about the nature and existence of God based on our observations of the universe. This type of enquiry is also known as "Natural Theology". Philo, the character in the Dialogues who presents the case against God's existence based on evil, first states his case in the following manner:

> Why is there any misery at all in the world? Not by chance, surely. From some cause then. Is it from the intention of the Deity? But he is perfectly benevolent. Is it contrary to his intention? But he is almighty. Nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive; except that

> we assert, that these subjects exceed all human capacity, and that our com mon measures of truth and falsehood are not applicable to them... (Hume, 1963, 175)

Here we have a deductive argument. The premise that misery exists is established by observation, and Philo is suggesting that there is an inconsistency in supposing that there exists misery and a God who is totally good and totally powerful. This is a classic statement of what contemporary analytical philosophers call "the logical argument from evil." The conclusion that Hume puts into Philo's mouth is not that God does not exist, but that human beings do not have the capacity to settle this issue one way or the other, at least by the use of reason. Although there are some passages in Hume's published works which suggest that faith, rather than reason, provides a good basis for religious belief, (Hume, 1902, 103: Hume, 1963, 204), these may well have been included to avoid persecution. In any case, 20th Century followers of Hume (e.g. Mackie 1990) have taken the further step of saying that a correct use of human reason leads to the conclusion that God does not exist.

In the Dialogues, Philo relinquishes this first argument very quickly, and takes another approach, which is summarized a few pages later:

> In short, I repeat the question: Is the world, considered in general, and as it appears to us in this life, different from what a man or limited Being would, beforehand, expect from a very powerful, wise, and benevolent Deity? It must be a strange prejudice to assert the contrary. And from thence, I con clude, that, however consistent the world may be, allowing certain supposi tions and conjectures, with the idea of such a Deity, it can never afford us an inference concerning his existence. (Hume. 1963, 179)

Once again, the conclusion for which Philo argues is not that God does not exist, but that human reason cannot show that he does. In this case, the existence of evil is presented as strong evidence against the existence of God. Analytical philosophers refer to this style of argument as being an instance of "the evidential argument from evil."

Readers who are confused by the difference between logical and evidential arguments from evil should consider the following analogy. A woman discovers her husband in bed with another woman. Both of them are naked. She tries to offer a deductive argument for the conclusion that he is having an affair with the other woman. This approach is not likely to be successful. To defend himself, the man simply has to demonstrate that there is no logical absurdity involved in his being in bed, naked, with another woman and yet not having an affair with her. He can claim that

a wicked fairy cast a spell that caused the two of them suddenly to feel extremely sleepy, and that their clothes were eaten by a group of giant moths, which have since left the building. Such explanations may be unbelievable, but they do not constitute logical absurdities.

The distressed wife can, however, argue that, even though there is no valid deductive argument which proves that her husband has been cheating on her, the evidence against him is extremely powerful. By far the most compelling explanation of the observed data is that her husband has in fact been having an affair - unless, of course, he can produce some further evidence for the existence of wicked fairies and giant moths.

In the 20th Century, J. L Mackie used a form of the logical argument from evil in his classic statement of the case for atheism:

> The problem of evil, in the sense in which I shall be using the phrase, is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good. And it is a logical problem, the problem of clar ifying and reconciling a number of beliefs. (Mackie, 1990, 25)

As Philo recognizes, deductive arguments, if they can be shown to be valid, and if the premises are known to be true, are decisive. Nor can there be much doubt about the truth of the premise "Misery is a pervasive feature of human experience." However, in order to have a deductively valid argument for atheism from evil, one needs an additional premise, such as "A good being never permits evil actions." But there are occasions in which good people allow bad things to happen, in order to bring about some greater good. The pain that a student suffers when receiving a failing grade is not good, but it is, frequently, a necessary part of the learning process, something from which the student derives a long term benefit. This, at least, is what professors tell themselves. Of course, we only consider it permissible to permit some evil if permitting either that evil, or an evil which is at least equivalent, is the only way to bring about a greater good, or else to avert a greater evil. Under what circumstances might an all-powerful God find that the only way to bring about some good was to allow some evil? In accordance with the vast majority of monotheistic philosophers throughout the ages, most analytical philosophers hold that even an all-powerful being is subject to the limitations of logic. If this is correct, then advances in the study of logic should enable philosophers better to understand the limitations within which God operates.

In the 1970's, Alvin Plantinga set out to defuse the logical problem of evil, that is, to demonstrate that it is not inconsistent to suppose that there exists an all-powerful, all-loving God and the amount of evil that we observe in the world.

(Plantinga, 1974) Plantinga's work was very technical, making use of what were then recent advances in the field of quantified modal logic. Briefly stated, Plantinga's argument was that it is possible that God cannot create a free being who will not rebel against him at some stage, and that all evil is the result of such rebellion - whether rebellion by human beings or by angelic beings. (This idea did not originate with Plantinga, of course. His innovation lay in the formal apparatus that was used to explain and defend this simple suggestion).

In the course of this discussion, Plantinga made two distinctions which have entered the vocabulary of analytical philosophers of religion. The first was a distinction between a "theodicy" and a "defense." (Plantinga, 1974, 10) The term "theodicy" has been used from the time of Leibnitz onwards as a name for attempts to explain why God allows evil. Plantinga's distinction was between a proposed account of why God does, in fact, allow evil - he reserves the word theodicy exclusively for this purpose - and proposed accounts of reasons why God might allow evil - these are labeled "defenses" by Plantinga. The difference is that a defense is more modest: the claim is made that something is a sufficient reason for allowing evil, but the possibility is left open that God's reasons for allowing evil are unknown to us, and perhaps exceed our understanding.

Plantinga also distinguishes between what he terms "the epistemic problem of evil," and the "religious problem of evil," (also frequently called "the pastoral problem of evil"). The "epistemic problem of evil" is the problem of showing that the existence of evil does not constitute a sufficient reason for supposing that belief in God is irrational. However, there are, as Plantinga admits, all kinds of ways in which suffering, or seeing someone suffer, terrible amounts of evil might be damaging to the faith of a Christian. Evil can create a distance between a believer and God for reasons which are entirely unconnected with epistemology and logic - and Plantinga does not claim that the tools of analytical philosophy are appropriate for solving this pastoral problem. (Plantinga, 1974, 63)

In distinguishing between the philosophical and pastoral problems of evil, Plantinga is acknowledging that what he says is not intended to be used to comfort those who are bereaved, and might even be counter-productive in such a situation. It should be emphasized that Plantinga's refusal to provide a detailed discussion of the pastoral problem in his published work is in no way an indication that he thinks it unimportant. On the contrary, he writes with an attitude of humility.

He does not attempt to use his training as an analytical philosopher to accomplish a task for which he is not qualified. Rather, he uses his intelligence to achieve what intelligence can achieve, and leaves those who have wisdom to perform the role of pastor. His statement that he is aiming to offer a defense rather than a theodicy manifests the same modesty about the role of philosophy. If Plantinga's perspective

is correct, it may be possible for philosophers to have some insight into the limits within which an omnipotent being operates, but that does not mean that the exercise of human rationality can enable us to read the mind of God: knowledge about God's purposes would have to be the result of divine revelation, just as I do not know what other people are feeling unless they choose to reveal it.

It would not be true to say that Plantinga has delivered the final word on the logical problem of evil, but, since he wrote, analytical philosophers who are opposed to religious belief have tended to follow Philo's example, and place more emphasis on evidential arguments from evil. William Rowe (Rowe, 1996) and Paul Draper, (Draper, 1996) for example, have argued that the amount of pain that exists in the world provides strong evidence for the proposition that there is no God. The deductive case against God based on evil can only be successful if it can be demonstrated that there is a logical absurdity in supposing that there exists some good which outweighs the amount of evil in the world, and that God could not bring about this good without also allowing the amount of evil which we observe.

Rowe's argument is that, even though we lack a deductive proof that there cannot possibly be such a good, all the evidence we have, based on what we know about the nature of good and evil, pleasure and pain, suggests that there is not, in fact, some greater good which could provide God's justification for allowing evil. Hence, it is argued, the evidence we have favours the assertion that God does not exist.

The responses of Christian analytical philosophers to the evidential case may be divided into two camps. Some, such as Stephen Wykstra, (Wykstra, 1984), have argued that we are not in a position to judge what purposes an all-knowing being might have for permitting evil. We must admit that we are incapable of forming an opinion about what kind of world a being who is supremely powerful and supremely good would choose to create. This line of argument, if successful, would defend Christianity against the evidential case from evil. It would also, however, make it hard for the Christian to argue that the existence of the universe and its natural order provides good reason for believing that God does exist.

The price to be paid for Wykstra's defense is conceding Hume's point that we cannot arrive at knowledge about the nature and existence of God from studying the universe. At least, this price must be paid if the confirmation theory is the preferred vehicle to take us from knowledge about the universe we observe (used as evidence) to knowledge of God (an unobserved hypothesis), and confirmation theory is by far the most promising technique available to analytical philosophers to carry out this task. The reason for this difficulty is as follows. If we use confirmation theory to demonstrate that it is probable that God exists, we treat the existence of God as a hypothesis which enables us to make sense of the world. This means that we must be able to say things such as "If there were a God, he would probably create a world

like this", and that requires some insight into what an all-knowing and all-powerful Being would be likely to do.

The foremost exponent of Natural Theology amongst analytical philosophers is Richard Swinburne. In 1979 - the same year that Rowe was using confirmation theory to demonstrate that God's existence was unlikely, Swinburne published *The Existence of God*, in which he argued that confirmation theory can be used to show that it is very likely that God exists. It is essential to Swinburne's case that we can tell what kind of evidence favours the existence of God, and what kind of evidence, most especially the existence of evil, counts against the existence of God. In order to carry his project through successfully, Swinburne has to show that, contrary to what we might initially think, we can understand the reasons why a good God would allow the amount of pain and suffering that we see - a much more ambitious claim than Wykstra's. Swinburne addressed this issue in *The Existence of God*, and has returned to it many times since, devoting an entire book, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, to the question in 1998.

For Christian analytical philosophers, then, the key question concerning evil is whether there exists some greater good, which even God cannot bring about without permitting evil, and whose existence outweighs the amount of evil in the world. At one end of the spectrum, Wykstra is content to argue that we do not have sufficient evidence to claim that such a good does not exist. Swinburne, at the other extreme, attempts to discover what that good is. All of them make use of the latest techniques of formal logic and confirmation theory. This highly technical philosophical work is strictly separated from the "pastoral problem of evil": I know of no analytical philosopher who contends that information about modal logic or confirmation theory will ease the burden of those who suffer or witness terrible evil. The task of arriving at truth is strictly separated from the task of offering comfort.

So, we again face the question. Does this - this set of attempts to argue that there is, or for all we know there might be, some reason God has for allowing innocent people to suffer, this set of writings which makes no claim to comfort those who mourn - does this lead to something worthwhile?

Objections to the Christian Analytical Approach

If there are inherent flaws in analytical philosophy, then one would expect that these would be clearly revealed by the response of analytical philosophers to the problem of evil. When Christian and non-Christian analytical philosophers argue about whether the existence of evil should lead us to the conclusion that God does not exist, it is at least clear that both sides are playing the same game, where the rules

are more or less agreed. There have, however, been Christian thinkers at one remove from analytical philosophy who have claimed that their fellow Christians are wrong to get involved in this game at all, and that Christian analytical philosophers, irrespective of how well or badly they succeed in being analytical philosophers, are failing to be good Christians.

One such critic is D. Z. Phillips, (Phillips, 1993). Phillips is a follower of Wittgenstein, whose early work established him as one of the founding fathers of analytical philosophy. Phillips, however, is more influenced by Wittgenstein's later work, in which he tried to lead philosophy in a radical new direction; roughly speaking, he hoped that observation of the way language is used would release would-be philosophers from their unfortunate urge to tell people what they ought to believe. (Phillips' own account of the significance of Wittgenstein's later work may be found in Phillips, 1993, 237-255. The best starting point for readers who wish to study Wittgenstein's later work at first hand is Wittgenstein, 1967). Most analytical philosophers appreciate the need to respond to the challenges posed by Wittgenstein's later writings, but very few of them share Wittgenstein's antagonism towards systematic discussion of metaphysical issues. Amongst those who did follow Wittgenstein's lead was one of his pupils, Rush Rhees, who was, in turn, the teacher of D. Z. Phillips. (An account of the relationship between Wittgenstein and Rhees, and, in turn, Rhees and Phillips, may be found in Phillips' preface to Rhees, 1997.) Phillips writes as a philosopher and a Christian who has an insider's knowledge of analytical philosophy, but whose approach to philosophy is very much at odds with that which is now dominant within the analytical tradition. In particular, Phillips inherits from Wittgenstein and Rhees a conviction that the criteria that govern religious judgements need not be the same as the criteria that we use in making judgements about non-religious matters.

For example, while one might reasonably say, when asked whether the sound coming from the distance is an aeroplane, "It probably is," there is, according to these philosophers, something odd about answering the question "Is there a God?" with "There probably is." Judgements about probability have their place in science, not religion. To adopt Wittgenstein's terminology, probability goes against "the rules of the religious language game."

As we have already seen, a key question in the debate about evil amongst analytical philosophers is whether there is, or might be, some reason God has which justifies him in allowing evil events to take place, as a parent might be justified in allowing a child to suffer great pain at the dentist. Phillips argues that, if we suppose that God allows evil to occur in order to fulfil some good purpose, we are supposing that God is like a politician who allows evil to flourish as a means to bringing about some good end. He states that this results in a conception of God which is "mon-

strous" (Phillips, 1993, 159). It is not merely that Phillips disagrees with the results of certain philosophical calculations concerning evil. He finds the very act of making calculations about the cost of evil repugnant: "I object to the concept of calculation in this context, because it excludes moral concepts." (Phillips, 1993, 158)

If one excludes calculation, one would, by the same rationale, exclude any of the attempts at taking a scientific approach which characterize analytical philosophy. If calculation is excluded, one might worry that analytical philosophers will be left with nothing to say about evil at all.

In fact, according to Kenneth Surin, (Surin, 1986), Christian philosophers should limit themselves to saying nothing at all about evil. Kenneth Surin is a Christian theologian who has an in-depth knowledge of analytical philosophy, and he is deeply opposed to the attempts which Christian philosophers have made to solve the problem of evil. Surin argues that it is wrong for Christians to talk about the problem of evil in any way that does not take into account the feelings of those who suffer. Indeed, he goes so far as to argue that analytical philosophers, who treat evil as an abstraction to argue about, are contributing to, rather than solving, the problems created by evil:

> A theodocist who, intentionally or inadvertently, formulates doctrines which occlude the radical and ruthless particularity of human evil is, by implication, mediating a social and political practice which averts its gaze from the cruelties that exist in the world. The theodocist, we are suggesting, cannot propound views that promote serenity in a heartless world ...she must at least not attempt to disengage herself from ...the plight [of people who suffer] by adhering to a viewpoint of specious generality, which effectively reduces theodicy to mere ideology, and which in the process merely reinforces the powerlessness of those who are powerless. (Surin, 1986, 51-52)

In the case of the most terrible evil, such as the holocaust, what words of comfort can we offer? We might be able to help those who have suffered to articulate their feelings of grief, but rational discourse of the type favoured by analytical philosophers is, in some cases, out of the question:

> No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.' [Greenberg, 1977, 23] No attempted justification of God on the part of human beings can aspire to meet this test; indeed, the very thought that it is possible for someone to say, with the sufferings of these children in mind, that God is justified, is a blasphemy. (Surin, 1986, 147)

Phillips and Surin have raised legitimate concerns about the responses of Christian analytical philosophers to the occurrence of evil. There can be little doubt that telling a distraught mother that her child's death is justified because it is a necessary part of some divine plan which will lead to long term happiness is only likely to increase her anger and pain. It is true that Christian analytical philosophers do not claim to be pastors, and do not set out to comfort the afflicted when they offer defenses and theodicies.

However, from Surin's point of view, that they do not set out to comfort the afflicted is an indication that, in their desire to be analytical, they have forgotten their duty as Christians. Christianity, after all, is supposed to be good news, and in particular, good news for those who mourn now.

If the best that Christian analytical philosophers can offer is, by their own admission, not likely to be a source of comfort to those in distress, might that not be an indication that they have unintentionally drifted away from Christianity? But if the response of writers like Plantinga, Swinburne and Wykstra is not an adequate Christian response to evil, then what is? Until this question has been answered, it is impossible to discern what role, if any, the techniques of analytical philosophy might have to play in a Christian response to evil. To what extent can analytical philosophy help in times of genuine suffering? That is the question I wish to answer, and it is, I think, a question that can only be answered in the light of personal experience. I am therefore forced to make use of anecdotal evidence.

One example of evil

When I was a studying for a postgraduate degree in philosophical theology, I was awakened one afternoon from my afternoon nap by a radio bulletin. The date was 13th March 1996, and the news was that at 9.30am, a mad gunman had entered a primary school in Dunblane, a small town in Scotland, and shot 16 children, their teacher, and himself.

The news came as a particular shock to me because I have friends in Dunblane, and have visited the town. I found the thought of such a terrible act of evil taking place in the heart of such a warm community almost unbearable. I also realized, of course, that any shock I was suffering would be nothing compared to that of my friends who were members of that community. I knew that I had to contact them, but what to say? It is perhaps true that the most helpful immediate pastoral response to inscrutable evil is a sympathetic silence, but conveying sympathy from a distance requires some form of communication. At any rate, I had a brief telephone conversation in which I said just enough to let my friends know that I was thinking of them

and their community, and praying for them.

Silence may be the best response in the initial stage of grief and shock, but I think that it would be simplistic and cowardly, from a pastoral perspective, to suppose that one should never go beyond that stage of silence. That would be to linger permanently in the worst phase of grief. In any case, after a few days, some thoughts crystallized in my mind, and I wrote a letter. I found myself turning not to the techniques of analytical philosophy in which I was being trained, but, instinctively, I found myself expressing my thoughts in the form of a story. I do not remember the exact words that I used, but I do remember the story which I wrote - and this is it.

There was once a King ...

There was once a King, and he was not a kind King. He watched over his people not as a hen watches her chicks, but as a hawk watches her prey. When his servants made mistakes, he would not reprimand them gently with his tongue - he would lash them with his whip. Disobedience would be punished by death. Every day, he would look out of his window at his land and say, "I am the only ruler here, and my people know it," and he would laugh with pleasure at the thought.

One day, three foreign visitors arrived at his palace. The King did not like receiving foreign guests, because he hated to speak to anyone who was not bound to obey him, but seeing by their clothes that they were rich, he decided to receive them.

"We have come bearing gifts for the King," said the visitors.
"Then give them to me, for I am the King," he replied.
"But the gifts are not for you," said the visitors, "they are for the new King."
"There is no new King here," he said, "there is only one King, and I am he."
"Can it be that you are unaware of what has happened?" they replied. "There is a small town in your land, where there has been born a child who will grow up to be the greatest King who has ever lived, and whose name will be remembered forever. You must feel truly honoured that this new King has been born in your country, and that, when the tale of his wonderful life is told and retold throughout the ages, people will remember that you were the ruler who was given the sacred task of protecting him during his childhood years."
The King was greatly displeased at these words, but he kept his anger within his heart, and concealed his malice behind a cold smile.
"I am honoured indeed," he said, "and will be sure to send this child a gift of my own."

But after the visitors had gone, he did not hide from his courtiers the anger that lay inside him. He summoned his advisors together and said
"So, now I find out what is really going on in my Kingdom - and I will not forget

that not one of you told me about this plot. I know how these people think. They live in a small town, on the edge of my Kingdom. They think that I pay no regard to what happens there, and so they dare to plot against me, raising up some baby to be my assassin. I will remind these people who is the King of this land!"

And he ordered one of his servants to go to the town, and kill all of the children. The servant carried out his master's bidding, and the people of the town wept bitter tears.

That evening, the servant reported what he had done, and the King went to sleep with a smile on his face. But his dreams were troubled. As he lay there in his bed, tossing and turning, it seemed that a crowd of angels flew into his room and gathered around his bed. They glowed with an inner light which shone so brightly that he could not look at them directly, he blinked his eyes and tried to turn his face away, but where ever he turned his gaze, there were angels, and the light was so bright that even with his eyes closed, he was dazzled.

Then he felt himself floating upwards. He tried to grab hold of his mattress, but it was too late. He was flying out of the room, surrounded by angels, and off into the night. He looked down on his palace, and it was tiny. He looked down at his Kingdom, and for the first time, he saw how small it was. Then they were flying amongst the clouds, which towered above them like mountains - and there, perched on the top of the tallest cloud, was a castle - so much bigger than any building the King had ever seen before. They flew through a tall arch-way, into a long hall. There were more angels inside, hovering on his left and right, and, at the far end of the hall was a huge golden throne. Seated on the throne was a small boy, who smiled at the King.
"Do you know who I am?" said the child, "I am the King you tried to kill today.'
"Tried to kill you," said the King, "Tried to? You were killed I say. Every child in that town was killed."

"Oh yes, you killed many innocent children - but don't you see that however many innocents you kill, you can never kill me, for I am Innocence, and I do not die."
"If I can never kill you, I will never serve you," said the King, "Rule this castle in the clouds if you want to - but I demand that you send me back to my Kingdom."
"Your Kingdom?" replied the child, "You have no Kingdom. Take a closer look at these angels you see - do you not recognize them?"

The King tried to close his eyes, but he could not help himself and looked directly at the angels, although the light seemed to stab right through his head like a knife. He saw that all the angels were children, and what he found most unbearable was the way they smiled at him, laughing.

"Yes," said the child, "these are the children you killed today: and do you know why they shine like that? It is because they have been bathed in the tears that

were shed for them by the people of their town - and every tear that was shed for them shows that you do not rule the hearts of those people. If you are not the ruler in their hearts, you are not their ruler in any way at all. In no way do you rule those people. In no way do you have a Kingdom."

"I know what place this is," said the King, defiantly, "this place is hell - but I will not be frightened. This is not a real place, just a dream to frighten children. It is just a dream I say!"

And with those words, he woke up, and found himself sitting bolt upright in bed, and the dazzling light of the angels was just the light of the sun coming through the windows. Yes, he told himself, it was just a dream. The children he had killed were really dead, and there would be no judgement for him after death. It was just a bad dream, he should forget about it, and go on with his life as before. He went to his window, as he always did first thing in the morning, to look out upon his kingdom. Then the words of the child came back to him:

"Every tear that was shed for them shows that you do not rule the hearts of those people. If you are not the ruler in their hearts, you are not their ruler in any way at all. In no way do you rule those people. In no way do you have a Kingdom."

He recognized the truth of these words, and realized that the land he was looking at was not his Kingdom at all, and that his power was, and always had been an illusion. He realized that he had lost the only thing that had ever mattered to him.

He tried to cry, but no tears would come.

The application of the story

I came up with this story by instinct - or rather, the story just came to me. It is not a solution to the problems caused by the killing of those sixteen children and their teacher, but it did provide some comfort to me and, from what they told me, to my friends. I do not think that an analytical argument, no matter how rigorous, could have served this role. But exactly how can a narrative such as this perform a pastoral role? To answer this question, I must engage in the risky task of providing an interpretation of my own narrative.

The narrative revolves around the killing of innocent children - but this killing itself is never described in detail: there is no need. The story was a response to a real event which was so horrific that any attempt to describe the horror would have been superfluous. What the narrative does is to provide a frame for this event in which it is given a meaning.

It will be recalled that Phillips' main complaint against analytical philosophers who think that they can solve the problem of evil is that they propose some

purpose in terms of which evil can be justified: pain and suffering are permissible, because they lead to this outcome, a good so great that it outweighs the pain needed to cause it. Phillips objects to the very idea of weighing good and evil.

In the narrative, events are given a meaning because they are treated as actions: attempts to carry out some purpose. However, the killing of the children is not seen as an attempt on anyone's part to perform some good purpose - it is seen as the result of the evil King's purposes. The agent who actually performs the killing is never named, except as being a servant who follows orders. He is insignificant. What matters is the would-be ruler, the King who is attempting to impose his power working through the servant.

The killing of innocent children in a small town is the link between the story and the actual event. By making the servant into an insignificant character, attention is deflected away from the actual gunman who shot the children. Of course, as is always the case after such a terrible atrocity, the newspapers afterwards scoured every aspect of the killer's biography, trying to fathom what forces produce such a monster, and whether his insanity could have been recognised earlier and prevented. No doubt such studies are useful, and perhaps they can be therapeutic - but, if so, the narrative offers a different form of therapy. Rather than dwelling on the psychology of the individual, the narrative focuses attention on the would-be ruler. The King does not act directly, but through other people. His desire is to impose his rule on the world. Although the story clearly has the Biblical story of the Massacre of the Innocents as its basis, the King is never named as Herod - that would just focus attention on another human individual. The King is not named because he is the one who pulls the strings whenever an evil action is performed - the Devil.

Once an action is seen as being an action of the Devil, it is seen as being one blow in an on-going battle between good and evil. The question then arises whether there is any way to fight back. The answer that the story gives is that the very act of mourning is the action which defeats the Enemy, thwarting his attempts to impose his own power. There are, of course, heavy hints about after-life and recompense - but the King dismisses these. The final defeat of the King takes place not in the after-life however, but in the "real" world.

Victory, and thus the possibility of comfort, is not deferred until an after-life whose very existence may be called into doubt, and which, at best, lies many years in the future. The victory takes place as soon as tears are shed. That does not in any way mean that the children's death was "worth it" because a victory was achieved. It does mean that, at a time when one might fail to feel that there are any reasons left for performing any kind of action, the very action that comes most naturally is seen to serve a worthwhile purpose.

The same pattern can be found in the writings of Emil Fackenheim,

(Fackenheim 1987), who escaped from Nazi Germany, and was concerned to find some way of making sense of life as a Jew after the Holocaust. The Holocaust, he pointed out, was a deliberate attempt to wipe out the Jewish religion. Therefore, the continued practice of Judaism takes on a new purpose: by observing the 613 commandments of the Torah, survivors are ensuring that the evil plan will be thwarted. There is thus a new commandment - Commandment 614:

> *For we are forbidden to turn present and future life into death, as the price of remembering death at Auschwitz. And we are equally forbidden to affirm present and future life, at the price of forgetting Auschwitz...the authentic Jew of today is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another, posthumous victory.* (Fackenheim, 1987, 159, italics original).

If I understand Fackenheim correctly, he thinks that abandoning the practice of Judaism would be "turning present and future life into death." In other words, although it is wrong for Jews to continue after the Holocaust as though nothing had happened (that would be "affirming present and future life, at the price of forgetting Auschwitz"), that reaction should not take the form of abandoning traditional Jewish observance.

It is important to notice that Fackenheim explicitly allows that Hitler did score a victory in Auschwitz. His aim is not to claim that there was something good in Auschwitz, nor that the suffering of Hitler's victims was justified because it led to a greater good. It is rather to help people find meaning and significance in their lives after the experience of suffering.

There is a general pattern here, but not a simple formula for constructing pastoral responses to evil. In any specific case, it is necessary to discern some connection between the original evil event and the action which may be performed in response. There will be need of a different narrative in each case - and perhaps it is too much to hope for that one can always find such a narrative. However, in searching for and telling such a narrative, we at least avoid the empty effort of technical discussions of confirmation theory and modal logic.

Also, in narrative which follows this pattern, we avoid having to say that the evil action serves some good purpose, that we should be thankful because it led to some greater good - and, it is because of their tendency to say such things that analytical philosophers of religion have such a bad reputation.

If then the tools of analytical philosophy are not necessary, and their words of comfort are likely to do more harm than good, is there any role left for analytical philosophy at all? It seems that analytical philosophers should stick to easy questions, questions such as the nature of arithmetic and the limits of thought, and leave

the question of evil to theologians and poets. But, on the other hand, philosophy has always been seen as the "handmaiden of theology," and I think that there is a reason for this. In the final section of this article, I want to make a proposal about the role that Christian analytical philosophy can play with respect to the problem of evil.

Stitching narratives together

For a narrative to function as a guide to life, it is not necessary that every individual proposition in the narrative be true. It is necessary that one be able to make certain connections between the narrative and the world that we live in. A narrative can only serve a successful pastoral function if it can be incorporated into the larger narrative that we tell to make sense of our whole life.

For example, in the story of the King, mourning is given a purpose because it is an action which leads to the defeat of the enemy, the would-be ruler. This makes no sense unless the original action of evil was the result of a malicious plan to exert authority over the Earth. If we cannot think of human actions as serving the ends of some offstage enemy, that is, if we do not believe that there is such a person as the Devil, can the narrative perform its pastoral function effectively? Of course, I cannot state that the narrative of the wicked King cannot be of any comfort to people who do not believe in a personal devil: it is not my place to say how people whose beliefs differ from my own are permitted to react to the story I told. The fact that I am a Catholic does not prevent me from learning from narratives of non-Christian religions, even though my beliefs are very different from the beliefs of those who created the stories. Different people will find links in different places - but, if the story is to be more than a distraction from life, the connections must be found somewhere. For me, the existence of a personal agent who attempts to use human beings for evil purposes constitutes a link between two narratives, the narrative of the King, which makes sense of a specific event, and the narrative of Creation, Fall and Redemption, which makes sense of the whole of human history and every aspect of my own life.

When we tie two stories together to form a larger narrative, the characters must retain their integrity. I do not mean by this that we cannot portray characters as undergoing change or development, or sometimes acting in an unexpected manner - this is a necessary part of depicting credible human characters. What must not happen is that we should cease to be able to feel that the narrator is still talking about the original character that we loved - or, indeed, the character we loved to hate. If that happens, the story will lose our interest. Even if we still believe that the propositions which make up the story are true, we will have lost our capacity to believe in the

story, that is, to use the story to make sense of our lives.

How then do we recognize that a story is being told about God, or about the Devil? The cartoonist Gary Larson, inventor of The Far Side, once drew a cartoon in which God (pictured as an old man with beard and halo) is taking part in a quiz show. God's score was extremely high - and Larson was careful to make sure that God's opponent had no score whatsoever; a being who lost even one point just would not be God, no matter how long his beard and how bright his halo. In any encounter between God and the Devil, God must be seen as victorious - this is a basic datum of Christian thought. That is why, in the Easter Collect, a beautiful hymn traditionally sung as part of the Easter Vigil service, the first Mass of Easter, the original sin of Adam is described, in the light of the Resurrection, as "*O felix culpa quae tantum ac talem redemptorem habere meruit.*" ("O happy fault which won such a great and good redeemer.") Similarly, the crucifixion, even though it appeared to Jesus' followers to be the final defeat of all their hopes, is a victory for God, not for the Devil. Any event, even if it seems at the time to be a victory for the forces of evil, must ultimately be seen as part of the triumph of God - to suppose otherwise breaks the pattern set by the grand narrative of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. Any response to evil which breaks with this narrative, while it may be pastorally effective, cannot be described as a Christian response.

But what does this have to do with Christian analytical philosophy? It will be recalled that the response of Christian analytical philosophers to the problem of evil involves two fields of study - logic and confirmation theory.

It will be recalled that the logical question concerns whether it is consistent to suppose that there exists a God who is totally powerful and totally good, as well as all the pain and suffering that we experience. Consistency matters because if two propositions are inconsistent, they cannot both be true. In other words, consistency is the minimum condition which a story has to meet if it can be considered a true story. When God is described as being "all-powerful," that is a shorthand way of saying that, in every encounter between God and the Devil, God is the ultimate victor. As the distinguished New Testament scholar N.T. Wright once put it (in a lecture), doctrine is basically "portable story." The concern for consistency is a concern that the story which we carry around to make sense of our lives satisfies the minimum conditions for being a true story.

Analytical Christian philosophers are also concerned with confirmation theory. Confirmation theory is concerned with the conditions under which a hypothesis is supported by available evidence. "Evidence" is, basically, the kind of thing that we encounter in our lives. A "hypothesis" is, basically, a story which we tell to make sense of the evidence. If the evidence supports the hypothesis, this means that, in the light of our experience, we have good reason to think that the story is true. Analytical

Christian philosophers are concerned with confirmation theory because they want to see whether the story of Creation, Fall and Redemption is not merely a consistent story - a story which satisfies the minimum condition for being true - but a story which we have good reason to suppose is true, sufficient reason for it to be worth the risk of basing our whole lives on this story. It is immoral to offer false comfort, to provide hope that is based on false promises. The question of truth cannot be neglected, and the tools of analytical philosophy have been developed by people who care passionately about truth. My answer to the question "Does this all lead to something worthwhile?" is "It's supposed to lead to truth: isn't that worthwhile?"

Analytical philosophers are not, for the most part, story-tellers. They are not trained to find the stories which will help those who are suffering to make sense of their lives. That is a task for saints and poets. However, if the saints and poets are to be able to carry out their task, which is a higher calling than the task of the analytical philosopher, they must be certain that the stories they tell to those who suffer can be tied in to the grand Christian narrative of Creation, Fall and Redemption - and sure that this grand narrative retains its plausibility.

The task of the Christian analytical philosopher is to check the threads carefully where these narratives are woven together and, if necessary, make minor alterations in the stitching. This kind of work attracts people who easily become obsessed with details that strike others as insignificant, and, to carry out the task properly, it is necessary to master a formidable technical vocabulary. It's a humble task, but a necessary and worthwhile one.

Acknowledgements:

Much of the material in this paper was first presented as a talk given to the Christian Graduate Forum in the University of Oxford. I am grateful to those who attended - all three of them - and provided me with useful comments. My thanks also go to Michael Patzia, who provided some extremely helpful criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Lesley Huss, and her family, whose friendship has meant so much to me.

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