THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AS A CHALLENGE FOR CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

Trial Lecture for the Degree of PhD

EMIL BØRTY NIELSEN

Indhold

1 Introduction

In this lecture, I will discuss the following questions: how does the problem of evil challenge Christian apologetics?

The question can be understood in two ways: either as a topic *in* the field of apologetics or as a challenge *to* the concept of apologetics.

I will focus on the latter question since it interacts more with the research I have done in my dissertation.

I will, further, assume that the audience is more familiar with the problem of evil than with the concept of apologetics. I will thus use more time on clarifying the concept of apologetics than on the problem of evil.

2 What is Christian Apologetics?

What is Christian apologetics? In chapter two of my dissertation, I have discussed this question in depth. I will not repeat that discussion here. Here it will suffice to give a short introduction to some of the main arguments and ideas.[1]

2.1 Three meta-apologetic theories
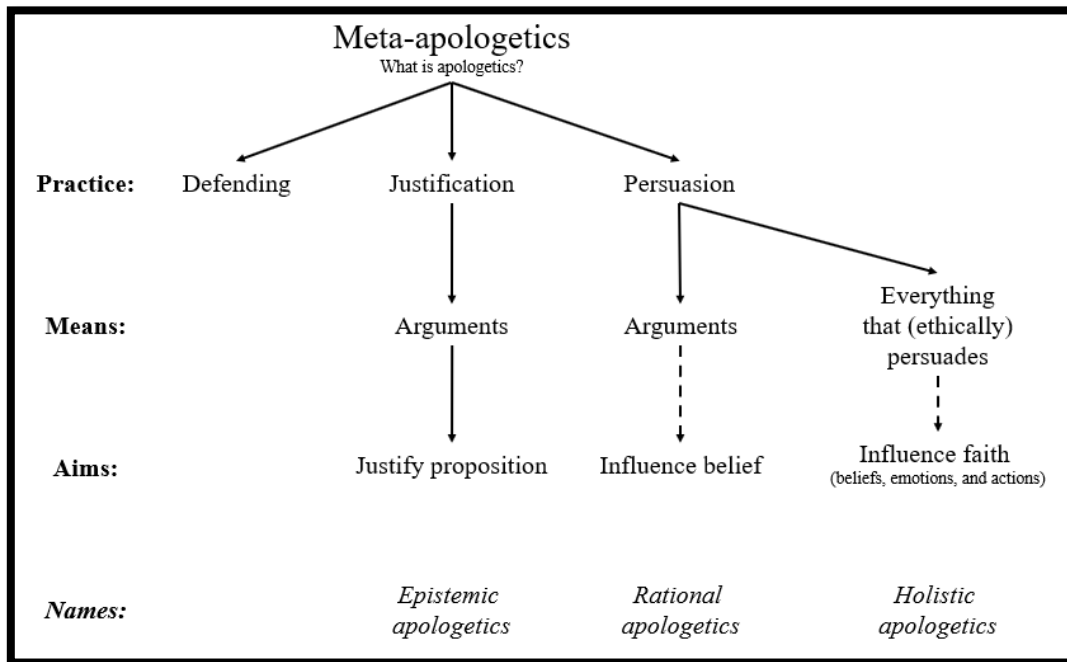
We will begin with the meta-apologetic question: What is apologetics?

The ordinary way of defining apologetics is as a *defense* of the Christian faith. This makes sense since the greek term *apologia* in antiquity meant to give a defense speech in court. But defining apologetics as a "defense" is not very helpful from a systematic perspective. What is a defense? Can we find a more precise term to identify what a defense is and to identify those practices that have historically been associated with that term?

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[1] This section also develops the terminology presented in my dissertation.

Initially, when I started pondering the nature of apologetics, I unconsciously assumed that apologetics was a justification of the Christian worldview. You easily get that impression when you read books on apologetics since that is often what they are trying to do.

At some point, I stumbled upon the concept of persuasion in relation to rhetoric. That concept helped me see apologetics in a larger framework. Apologetics is thus a persuasive practice comparable to rhetoric. We might also say that Christian apologetics is Christian rhetoric.

I am not the first, who has noted the importance of the concept of persuasion for apologetics. C. Stephan Evans, for example, opens *The New Dictionary of Apologetics* from 2006 by stating that apologetics is "the art of persuasion."[2] In my dissertation, I argue, that the field of apologetics has undergone a turn to rhetoric since the end of the twentieth century.

If apologetics is understood as persuasion, the question of method is raised: *how* should the apologist persuade? Recent writers on apologetics seem to group into two camps: those who use arguments to persuade and those who go beyond arguments. I have named these two positions rational and holistic[3] apologetics.

In my dissertation, I chose to employ the holistic definition of apologetics. My main argument is that the concept of rational apologetics easily gives us a faulty view of what goes on in the apologetic conversation. Humans are not entirely rational. Non-rational factors always affect us. Delimitating apologetics to rational apologetics might thus make the practitioner blind to what is actually going on in the conversation.

The irony is, though, that I still find myself using the term "apologetics" as rational apologetics in conversations. This has made me reflect on whether I have understated the case for the usefulness of the concept of rational apologetics in my dissertation. In my dissertation, I argue that the church has a moral responsibility to answer objections by presenting rational arguments. It might make good sense to have a specific term to denote this practice, and "apologetics" is the term often used to name it. The important thing is, though, that the "rational apologist" does not forget the large picture shown by the concept of holistic apologetics.

2.2   Three methods of apologetics

Now, let us proceed to the question of method. In my thesis I identified three methods of apologetics:

- Argumentative apologetics: persuading an interlocutor by presenting rational arguments
- Imaginative apologetics: persuading an interlocutor by showing the beauty and attraction of the Christian worldview
- Communitarian apologetics: persuading by living an attractive faithful Christian life

The three methods are delimitated both concerning aim and means. Argumentative apologetics aims at showing that Christianity is true. Imaginative and communitarian apologetics aims at showing it good.

Further, both argumentative and imaginative apologetics uses words to attain this goal, while communitarian apologetics uses actions.

	Aim	**Means**
Argumentative apologetics	Truth	Words
Imaginative apologetics	Good	Words
Communitarian apologetics	Good	Actions

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[2] Evans 2006, 3

[3] It is not only holistic in the sense, that the means applied are broader but also in the sense, that its aim is more broadly conceived. Faith is more than mere belief.

These three methods are taken from the apologetic theories of Richard Swinburne, Alister McGrath, and Stanley Hauerwas. But it should be noted that the clear typologies presented here are a bit too neat to represent the complexity of their writings. Still, I argue, that they represent an identifiable pattern in their writings and a helpful way of understanding apologetics.

2.3 Three views of human reason

The concept of argumentative apologetics is closely tied to the concept of reason. One important question concerns the strength of reason. Since the enlightenment western culture has lost its optimistic faith in reason. We might say that scholars have moved from a strong conception of reason to a weak conception.

We should remember, though, to distinguish between *global* and *local* reason. Reason might be strong in certain areas (like the natural sciences) while weak in others (like religion and philosophy).

The point is, that the stronger the conception of reason the apologist has, the more emphasis is moved to argumentative apologetics. This is exemplified by the three scholars I have examined in my dissertation:
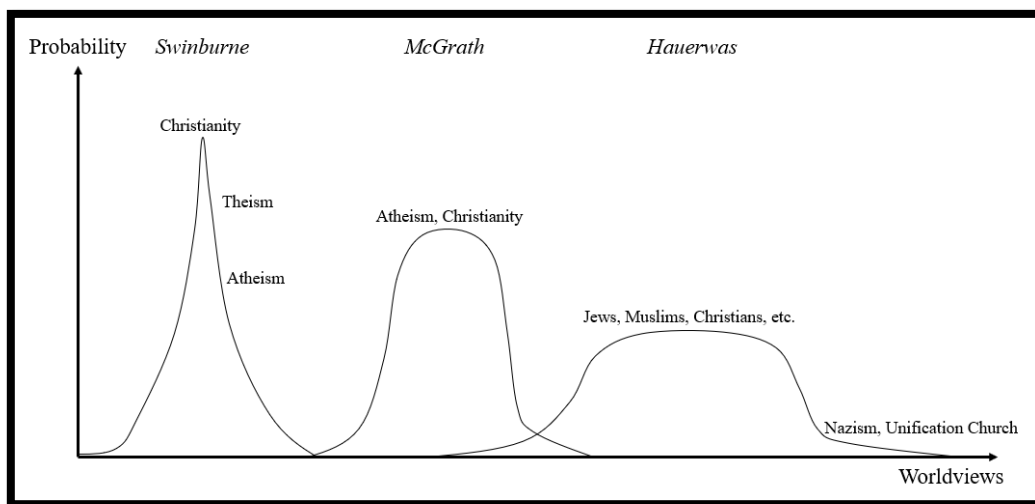
Richard Swinburne has the strongest conception of reason. He claims that he can show that Christianity is the most probable alternative. He thus only develops an argumentative apologetics.[4]

Alister McGrath has a more modest conception of reason. He claims Christianity is among the most rational traditions available. But, in contrast to Swinburne, McGrath goes beyond a purely argumentative approach and develops what I have named an imaginative apologetics.

Last, Stanley Hauerwas presents the weakest conception of reason. He does not completely reject the need for some kind of argumentative apologetics. But he does not believe it can take us very far. Instead, he turns his attention to the attraction of a church that faithfully embodies the goodness of God.

Swinburne	McGrath	Hauerwas
Strong reason	Moderate reason	Weak reason
Strong Argumentative apologetics	Moderate argumentative apologetics Imaginative apologetics	Weak argumentative apologetics Communitarian apologetics

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[4] It should be noted that Swinburne does not seek to develop a theory of apologetics. His project is to show his academic peers that Christian faith is rational.

2.4 Four levels of apologetics

The last piece of conceptual machinery I need to present before we can proceed is a way to distinguish between apologetics as different conceptual levels:

Level 4 Apologetic practice	S	M	H	M	H
Level 3 Apologetic theory (particular methods)	S	M	H	M	H
Level 2 Apologetic method (general methods)	Argumentative apologetics			Imaginative apologetics	Communitarian apologetics
Level 1 Meta-apologetics	Apologetics as persuasion				

Level one concerns meta-apologetics, that is, how we should overall define the nature, means, and aims of apologetics.

Level two concerns general methods of persuasion. In this lecture, I will focus on the three methods mentioned above.

Level three concerns specific instantiations of these general methods. We might also say, that this is the level of apologetic theory. Most books on apologetics work on this level.

Level four concerns applying a given method in practice. It is here that generalized apologetic theories and methods are applied in specific contexts and interactions.

This scheme is far from exhaustive, but I have found it quite helpful in my work. In section four, I will use it as a framework for answering the question of how the problem of evil challenges Christian apologetics.

3   What is the problem of evil?

Now, let us turn to the problem of evil.

In Danish, we often distinguish between "ondskab" and "onder". This distinction matches the traditional distinction between moral evil and natural evil.

Natural evils are all those experiences, things, and events that we deem bad and unwanted. Terms like "suffering" and "pain" are often used to name the essence of natural evil.

Moral evil, on the other hand, is suffering intentionally brought forth by human actions.[5] This kind of evil is moral in the sense, that the actor can be blamed for his actions.

Now, why is evil a problem for a Christian worldview? The Christian worldview posits the idea of an almighty God who loves human beings. This postulate seems to be in tension with the existence of evil and

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[5] Zagzebski 2007, 145

suffering. A loving almighty God would surely not place human beings in a world full of suffering and evil. A loving almighty God would surely not allow human beings to inflict suffering upon each other

The problem of evil has a long history, that is probably well known to most in the audience. It is a theme pondered upon in the Bible although a clear answer is never presented. In the book of Job, Job charges God, why he, a righteous person, has to suffer while the unrighteous prosper. But at the end of the book, God enters the scene. God does not give Job an answer. Instead, God shows Job his power and wisdom by telling him about the magnificent world he has created. This response calms Job and he withdraws his charges.

Christian thinkers have offered a variety of responses to this problem over the centuries.[6] In the next section, I will examine the responses presented by Swinburne, McGrath, and Hauerwas.

4   Dealing with the problem of evil at level 3

4.1.1   Swinburne's response to the problem of evil

We will begin by examining how Richard Swinburne responds to the problem of evil. His treatment of the problem is both highly detailed and extensive. In the following, I will only draw the contours of his answer.

Swinburne's main argument is that God has moral reasons for creating a world with a certain degree of evil and suffering. All the evils of the world thus serve a greater good.[7]

Swinburne explains moral evil by arguing that God cannot give humans free choice without permitting a certain degree of suffering, that might be brought about through the misuse of that freedom. But God did not only give humans free choice. He also created humans with evil desires. If humans had only desires for the good, then their freedom would have been significantly limited and they would not have been able to make significant moral choices.[8] The suffering brought about by evil desires and misuse of freedom is thus lesser than the good of human freedom and the good of being moral creatures.

Concerning natural evil, Swinburne claims that a world with natural evil would be at least as good as a world without. He offers two reasons. First, natural evil provides opportunities for morally valuable emotions like compassion and opportunities for humans to use their freedom to help others. Second, natural evil provides us with knowledge that enables us to make significant moral choices.[9] When I, for example, learn that cyanide is poisonous, I can make the difficult moral choice of poisoning or not poisoning my supervisor.

It is important to note, that Swinburne's discussion of the problem of evil is a part of a larger cumulative argument, where arguments for and against theism and Christianity must be balanced. I have made the following scheme to show this:

	(Generic) theism	Theism + afterlife + incarnation (Christian God)
A priori probability/simplicity	0,5	0,3
Arguments from existence, order, and consciousness	0,8	0,8
Suffering	0,5	0,5
Large amounts of suffering	0,3	0,5
Religious experience	0,9	0,9
Historical testimony to Jesus		0,99
Total	0,9	0,999

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[6] See Zagzebski 2007, 143-167; Andersen, Grønkjær and Nørager 2002, 146-158; Taylor 2009, 146-179.
[7] Swinburne 2004, 238
[8] Swinburne 2010, 86-93
[9] Swinburne 2004, 240-245

It should be noted that the numbers assigned here are not taken directly from Swinburne, but they mirror his conclusions.[10] I have added the numbers to ease understanding.

Swinburne admits that the large amounts of suffering observed in our universe form an argument against theism (0,3). To save theism from this, he must add the hypotheses of an afterlife and incarnation. If God shared our sufferings (incarnation) and offered compensation in an afterlife, then he would be morally permitted in allowing more suffering than on mere theism (0,5). The problem with this solution is that it lowers the *a priori* probability of theism: it is less simple and therefore less probable (0,3). What saves theism, in the end, is the argument from religious experience (0,9). The same goes for Christianity, although, what really makes Christianity stand out is the arguments for incarnation based on the historical testimony to Jesus (0,999).

On an overall assessment, it is thus rational to have Christian faith and follow the Christian way. This means, that the challenge the problem of evil poses to argumentative apologetics at level 3 is overcome. Further, the successful response can form a legitimate basis for an argumentative practice on level 4.

4.1.2 McGrath's response to the problem of evil
Now, let us turn to McGrath's response to the problem of Evil.

In dealing with the problem of evil scholars often distinguishes between two problems: A theoretical problem and an existential problem. The same distinction is found in how McGrath engages the problem. He thus distinguishes between *understanding* the problem of evil and *coping* with it.[11] These two problems are engaged by his two apologetic methods: argumentative apologetics deals with solving the theoretical problem, while imaginative apologetics seeks to help people cope with suffering.

In the works of McGrath, there is a movement over the years from theoretical answers to existential answers. The early McGrath thus saw the theoretical problem as being primary[12] while the late McGrath sees the problem primarily as being existential.[13]

Concerning the theoretical problem, McGrath presents the following five arguments:

- Human freedom implies suffering.[14]
- Life (as we know it) cannot exist without suffering.[15]
- God uses suffering to lead people to faith[16]
- The problem of evil reveals an absolute system of morals. This points to God.[17]
- No one can answer the problem. Human reason is too weak.[18]

The last response is interesting since it raises the question of how much we can expect human reason to understand the divine. McGrath claims, that acknowledging the impotence of human reason in relation to God is a sign of intellectual maturity rather than irrationality. This emphasis on the limitations of human reason does not make McGrath abandon argumentative apologetics. He states, for example, that "we can learn to live with these questions *if* we sense that there is an answer to be had."[19] Reason and arguments still

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[10] Swinburne 2004, chapter 14; 2003, 213-214
[11] McGrath 2019, 48
[12] McGrath 1993, 100
[13] McGrath 2019, 49
[14] McGrath 1993, 103
[15] McGrath 2016, 162
[16] McGrath 1993, 104
[17] McGrath 2016, 160; 2018, 159
[18] McGrath 2016, 162; 2018, 157
[19] McGrath 2018, 169 my italic.

play a role, but we have to be conscious of their limitations. We can thus only draw the contours of a vague answer.

This means, that the main question for McGrath, is not whether or not the question can be solved. No one can solve the problem of evil. The real question is what worldview offers the most satisfying answer to the existential problem: how do we cope with evil?[20]

McGrath claims, that the Christian tradition forms a framework that can help us find meaning in suffering and thus helps us cope.

The narrative of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ plays a central role for McGrath. He states that "to know Christ is to know a compassionate God"[21]. God shares our sufferings. God suffered on the cross.[22] This means, that we are not alone in our sufferings. God is present in our sufferings.[23] Further, Christ's death and resurrection not only mark that we are not alone in our sufferings, but it also marks that God has conquered our sufferings. We can thus live in hope, that suffering is only temporal while joy is permanent.[24]

These considerations do nothing to help solve the theoretical problem. Their value lies in the way, they change the net of meaning suffering is a part of. Our experience of suffering is thus changed. Meaningless and hopeless suffering is crushing. The Christian framework gives us hope and meaning in our sufferings and thus helps us cope.

Theoretical problem	Understanding	Argumentative Apologetics	- Human freedom implies suffering - Life as we know it could not exist with suffering. - God uses suffering to lead people to faith - The problem of evil reveals an absolute system of morals. This points to God. - No one can answer the problem. Human reason is too weak.
Existential problem	Coping	Imaginative apologetics	- God suffered on the cross - God is present in our sufferings - Suffering is temporal. Joy is permanent

4.1.3 Hauerwas's response to the problem of evil

Now, let us turn to the last apology: the response offered by Hauerwas.

Hauerwas is critical of all attempts to solve the theoretical problem of evil.[25] His main argument is that the "problem of evil" is not a *Christian* problem. It is only a problem for the deistic or theistic god invented by Enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century. If we construe "god" using philosophical terms like "almighty" and "perfect love" the problem immediately arises and it is impossible to solve. But the problem with "theism" is that it presupposes an untenable concept of universal rationality. What Enlightenment thinkers claimed as universal reason was actually an example of a particular rationality overinflated by raw power.[26]

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[20] McGrath 2016, 162
[21] McGrath 2018, 164, italic removed
[22] McGrath 2016, 160-162
[23] McGrath 2018, 158-159; 2019, 51
[24] McGrath 1993, 105-106;
[25] Hauerwas 1990, ix
[26] Hauerwas 1990. 47-48. 58

The fact that Hauerwas reject the "conventional" problem of evil does not mean that evil and suffering is not a challenge. The church still needs a way of responding to evil. Hauerwas charts two ways:

The first way is similar to McGrath's concept of imaginative apologetics. To cope with and respond to suffering, we need to locate our lives in God's narrative.[27] The Christian narrative thus gives us a framework to make sense of our suffering and thereby help us cope with it. I will leave this path aside since it is quite similar to McGrath's account.

The second way charted by Hauerwas focuses on the church. The church must become a community that absorbs suffering by staying faithful to the narrative of Jesus. Evil does not need a theoretical response; it needs an *embodied* response. That is, in my terms, the church need not argumentative apologetics but communitarian apologetics.

One way in which the church must absorb suffering is by being present to pain. When people suffer, they are often abandoned by others. It is uncomfortable to stay in the presence of one who is, for example, dying. But in Christ God has revealed himself as one who stays present to pain. The church must, therefore, become a community that develops the virtue of being present if it wants to stay faithful to Christ.[28]

It should be noted, that Hauerwas does discuss some theoretical solutions to the question of why God allows suffering. Further, he does not completely reject that they have gotten something right.[29] But his main point is, that they are, at best, practically inept. They do not help the church become a community that absorbs evil. Further, they might easily do more harm than good because they teach the church to confront suffering the wrong way.[30] Suffering should not be met by explanations but by presence, lament, and perplexity.[31]

Now, in dealing with the problem of evil and suffering Hauerwas does not make any explicit connections to apologetics and persuasion. But that does not mean that the link is not there. When the church stays faithful and becomes a community that absorbs suffering, then the church becomes an apologetic witness: it becomes an attractive community because it embodies the goodness of God.

5 Discussion of how the problem of evil challenges Christian apologetics at levels 1-4

We have now seen three different apologetic responses to the problem of evil. In the following, I will discuss how the problem of evil and Christian apologetics at levels 1-4 interact.

5.1.1 The problem of evil as a challenge to apologetics level 1-2

I will begin by arguing, that I do not see any reason to think that the problem of evil challenges Christian apologetics at level 1 or 2, that is, the problem of evil does not challenge the concept of apologetics as Christian persuasion nor the general methods presented.

To challenge levels 1 and 2 it is not enough that you reject all accounts given at level 3 since it is still possible to discover new accounts that might be successful. We cannot know in advance that no good answer can possibly be given to the problem of evil, even if we know that we have struggled with it for a long time. To fundamentally challenge levels 1 and 2 you would have to show an intrinsic problematic connection between those levels and the problem of evil. I cannot find any such connection. It is not, that it is impossible

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[27] Hauerwas 1990, 67
[28] Hauerwas 1986, 80
[29] Cf. Hauerwas 1990. 73-79
[30] Hauerwas 1990, 49
[31] Hauerwas 1990, 148-151

to imagine objections to apologetics at levels 1 and 2. In my dissertation, I examined several such arguments. But I cannot see that any follows from the problem of evil.

That being said, there might still be an objection that is closely linked to the problem of evil, that might challenge some accounts of argumentative apologetics and maybe also imaginative apologetics. I am here thinking of the concept of *divine hiddenness*. There seems to be a tension between a God who wants to hide for some reason and the apologist who wants to show the existence and beauty of God. How the two can fit together depends on how the doctrine is construed. Strong accounts of divine hiddenness severely challenge strong accounts of apologetics. But for apologetics to be rendered meaningless at level 2 one would have to make the radical claim, that God cannot be known *in any way*. And I do not think any Christian thinker would make such a radical claim.

I, therefore, conclude that the problem of evil does not challenge the concept of apologetics at levels 1 and 2.

5.1.2 Argumentative apologetics and the problem of evil

Does the problem of evil undermine argumentative apologetics at level 3 and therefore any meaningful argumentative practice at level 4?

It depends on two things. First, what criteria do we lay down for success? Second, how strong a response is the argumentative apologist able to present? I will begin, by discussing the former.

One challenge with the term "persuasion" is that it seems to insinuate an either-or. Either you are persuaded, or you are not. The argumentative response fails if it cannot persuade the interlocutor that the objection fails. In other words, if the argument presented cannot negate the disbelief caused by the problem then it fails.

If this criterion is applied many apologetic arguments fail. But I think this criterion is too strict. Above I defined faith as the aim of apologetics. From this one might infer, that if an apologetic means does not take the interlocutor to faith, then it has failed. But, obviously, if an argument moves the interlocutor *closer* to faith, then it should not be counted as a failure. What apologetics must do to be successful, is move the interlocutor towards the pattern of belief, emotions, and actions that is called Christian faith.

So, what is the effect of the responses? Here are four possibilities focused on belief, although a more encompassing analysis would also have to take into account the effect on emotions and actions as well.

The response might

- Negate disbelief
- Reduce disbelief
- Have No effect
- Increase disbelief

In the first two instances, apologetics succeeds at level 3 and is therefore meaningful as a practice on level 4. In the last two, it fails.

Swinburne, McGrath, and Hauerwas all claim that their responses overcome the theoretical problem and thus negate disbelief. But the ways they overcome the problem are fundamentally different and in tension.

Swinburne simply *solves* the problem the way argumentative apologetics usually does.

McGrath takes a middle position. He believes human reason can supply a vague solution while at the same time also emphasizing the limitations of reason. But these two elements need to go together. If there was not a vague solution available, the emphasis on the limitations of reason would have been unsatisfying.

Hauerwas *rejects* the problem instead of solving it. He thus rejects the presuppositions of the problem and thereby it loses its power. This means, that it is no longer a source for rational disbelief. On the other hand, if Enlightenment theism is assumed, then the problem is impossible to solve, and argumentative apologetics necessarily fails. His response thus holds an implicit critique of Swinburne and McGrath. First, their theoretical responses fail. Second, they commend belief in theism, not Christianity. They are thus instances of failed argumentative apologetics on level 3 and should not form a practice on level 4.

Common for all three is that they seek to negate the disbelief caused by the problem. And even if one does not find that they can do that, they might still be able to reduce disbelief and thus still be counted as successful instances of apologetics.

5.1.3 Imaginative apologetics and the problem of evil

Now, much of what I have just said about argumentative apologetics can be repeated about imaginative apologetics. This allows me to name an aspect, that I did not give attention to in my dissertation. Namely, the concept of imaginative objections.

Imaginative apologetics seeks to show the beauty of the world seen through the Christian tradition. Imaginative objections, on the other hand, claim that Christianity does the opposite: Christianity makes life dull, burdensome, or terrifying.

As an instance of an imaginative objection, the problem of evil presents an immense problem: what terror to live life before a sadistic God, who could remove our sufferings but refrains from it.

The task of the imaginative apologist is not to deny the reality of evil. Her task is to show another way of viewing Christianity that incorporates evil but changes its meaning. McGrath does this by focusing on a counternarrative: God suffering in Christ on the cross. This narrative means that God is present with us in suffering.

I do not think that McGrath would say that his response completely neutralizes the imaginative challenge. Dissonance is still present. There is broken glass in the stained window. But it is worth considering, whether the continued presence of dissonance in the big picture actually increases its overall beauty in a way similar to the way McGrath presents not having an answer as intellectual maturity. Beauty also comes from staying true to the complexity and mystery of things and to our own finitude.

This underscores an important point: Sometimes the best apologetics is counter-apologetics. Sometimes the best case is marshaling objections. Sometimes the best answer is to not answer.

It is worth noting, that argumentative and imaginative responses might be in tension. Arguments seldom touch our imagination. Often, they do the exact opposite: They seem gray and dull. In relation to the problem of evil, they might even function as an instance of counter-apologetics. The issue of evil is so serious that it is almost offensive to make it into an intellectual exercise. Both McGrath and Hauerwas make this point. It is thus important to note, that the apologetic practice must integrate and contextualize the different apologetic approaches. This does not mean, that purely argumentative responses to the problem of evil are never legitimate. In the context of scholarly books, for example, they might not only be legitimate but also rationally required. But we should remember, that when we, for example, take these arguments from a book to a conversation we change context. And the context is decisive for their value and legitimacy.

Well, this is a bit of a side-track, so let me return to the main topic. The existential problem of evil poses a serious imaginative challenge for Christian apologetics. Many responses have been posed over the centuries, some more successfully than others. I do not see any reason to think of it as a challenge *to* the field of apologetics, but rather I see it as a challenge *in* the field of apologetics.

5.1.4 Communitarian apologetics and the problem of evil

Now, let us turn to the last apologetic method: communitarian apologetics. Does the problem of evil challenge this approach to apologetics?

Communitarian apologetics is fundamentally different from argumentative and imaginative apologetics: the latter two offer a verbal response, and the former offers an embodied response.

An embodied response aims to counteract the feeling that God is evil. To form such a response the Church must live in a way, that exemplifies the goodness of the Christian narratives about the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

In the following, I will discuss two questions

- Should we abandon argumentative apologetics in favor of communitarian?
- What effect can we expect from communitarian apologetics?

I will begin with the first question. In my dissertation, I have argued for a combinatorial approach to apologetics. Hauerwas argues that we should abandon argumentative approaches in our response to the problem of evil.

The question is whether we can avoid letting our theoretical response ruin our existential response. Hauerwas highlights a similar problem in medicine. The science of medicine tends to reduce the patient to an object that needs to be manipulated. Hauerwas urges for the recovery of the patient as a person with a history. But this recovery does not make him want to abandon the science of medicine. The two need to go together. I argue the same concerning the problem of evil. Hauerwas is right in highlighting the existential significance of an embodied response and the dangers of theory. But I do not think the solution is to abandon theory. The solution is to learn the importance of context. Argumentative apologetics needs to be applied in the right context.

Now, let us turn to the second question. How effective is communitarian apologetics? Or, we might ask: How good is the Church? How good can we expect the church to be?

Communitarian apologetics stands in tension with the doctrine of human sinfulness in the same way as argumentative and imaginative apologetics stands in tension with divine hiddenness. Both of these doctrines humble our concept of apologetics. We should not expect that apologetics can give us full explanations, pure beauty, and a community of perfect love. But, as I have argued above, less can also constitute success.

Maybe the important point is, that apologetics is not a field distinct from theology as if the latter gave the content and the former the justification. Apologetics and theology are interwoven. A comprehensive theory of apologetics thus needs to take account of the epistemic, aesthetic, and ethical significance of all parts of Christian doctrine.

So, does evil challenge communitarian apologetics? The evil *outside* us challenges the church to form a community that embodies the goodness of God. But even more, the evil *inside* us challenges our expectations to such an embodied response. This does not mean that communitarian apologetics necessarily fails, but only that our concept of communitarian apologetics must be humbled by our recognition of human sinfulness.

6 Conclusion

Now, I will conclude this lecture. The problem of evil is a challenge to Christian apologetics, a challenge that calls for a response. But it does not challenge the concept of Christian apologetics itself (levels 1-2). A variety of responses have been produced over the centuries (level 3). It is of course true, that many of these responses are problematic for a variety of reasons. But to challenge the concept of apologetics itself (level 1-

2), one would have to show both that all of these responses are unsuccessful and that no one will ever be able to produce a successful response in the future. Both of these tasks seem impossible from my perspective.

The classical discussion of the problem of evil is located at level 3. Maybe some had expected that I would present my own views on the problem of evil in this lecture. I have omitted this task. Instead, I have tried to locate the problem of evil in the meta-apologetic framework I have constructed in my dissertation. The real work is thus still to be undertaken. My hope is, that the framework I have presented in this lecture and in my dissertation might increase clarity in future discussions. Thank you.[32]

7 Literature

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