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July 2024

## Sterba's Horrendous Evils and Adams' Goodness of God

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### Recommended Citation

Snow, Cody. 2024. "Sterba's Horrendous Evils and Adams' Goodness of God." *Eleutheria: John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Academic Journal* 8, (1). <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eleu/vol8/iss1/5>

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## Sterba's Horrendous Evils and Adams' Goodness of God

### Abstract

This article articulates and responds to James Sterba's Problem of Horrendous Evils from his recent work *Is A Good God Logically Possible*. Specifically, this article argues that Sterba's arguments against Marilyn McCord Adams' compensatory theodicy fails to undermine the effectiveness of the theodicy. Moreover, this article argues that Adams' theodicy is successful at removing the core tension at the heart of the Problem of Horrendous Evils and that this theodicy only strengthens appeals to Greater Goods theodicies.

### Keywords

James Sterba, Marilyn McCord Adams, Theodicy, Problem of Evil, Horrendous Evils

### Cover Page Footnote

The author holds an M.A. in Theological Studies from Liberty University, 2023. He also holds a B.A. in Humanities with a minor in Philosophy from the College at Southwestern Theological Seminary, 2021.

### **Sterba's Horrendous Evils and Adams' Goodness of God**

Evil exists. Beginning with Epicurus, continuing with Hume, and maturing with J. L. Mackie, this reality has been used as a proof to reject the existence of God. However, for at least as long, theists have wrestled with the complications of holding both that

1. God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.

and

2. Evil exists.

For some, the problem of evil represents a convincing reason to reject theism altogether. For others the problem of evil represents a challenge to the very goodness of God.

In response to this tension, Marilyn Adams proposed the idea that making use of the goodness of God is essential to defeat particularly horrific evils. Rather than being a challenge to the goodness of God, it seems that only by invoking the goodness of God can horrendous evils be overcome. Most recently in the work of James Sterba this theodicy has been challenged. Despite these challenges, this paper will argue that the existence of horrendous evils is consistent with the existence of God due to the goodness of God being sufficient to overcome any and all evils experienced in this life.

This paper will have three major parts. Firstly, the problem of horrendous evils will be outlined and articulated, including Sterba's and Adams' articulations. Secondly, Adams' theodicy will be outlined as a solution to the problem of horrendous evils. Thirdly, Adams' theodicy will be shown to overcome Sterba's criticisms and will further be shown to support other popular theodicies. This paper will then conclude that Sterba's objections fail to undermine Adams' theodicy.

### **The Problem of Horrendous Evils**

Mackie's influential essay "Evil and Omnipotence" explains the tension between holding both 1 (God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good) and 2 (evil exists). For it seems that an omnipotent God is able to eradicate evil, and a perfectly good God would want to eradicate evil, and yet evil exists.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *The Problem of Evil*, eds. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25—26.

Therefore, it is Mackie's contention that 1 and 2 are logically contradictory.<sup>2</sup> This 'logical problem of evil' was the focus of much discussion throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Most theologians and philosophers eventually came to reject this version of the problem of evil due to the idea that it seems logically possible that God could have good reasons for permitting the existence of evil, and as long as this remains a logical possibility, there is no logical contradiction between 1 and 2. This can be seen most clearly in the works of Pike and Plantinga.<sup>3</sup> However, this dialogue produced a new articulation on the problem of evil based not on the existence of evils in general but based on the existence of particularly horrific evils.

The strength of the problem of evil for many theologians and philosophers has been in the observation and experience of particularly horrendous evils. Marilyn McCord Adams and Sterba, who borrows her definition, understand horrendous evils as evils "the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole."<sup>4</sup> Adams has in mind the most horrible experiences of evil and suffering experienced in this life: violent sexual abuse unto death, cancer in children, psychological torture, starvation, extreme child abuse, or the non-negligent actions of a parent that results in the death of their child. The question shifts from "Why would God allow evil simpliciter?" to "Why does God allow *these* evils?" For both Adams and Sterba, horrendous evils cannot be resolved with the same generic defenses as the logical problem of evil.

### Horrendous Evils and Sterba

Sterba attempts to undermine classical solutions to the problem of evil by way of analogy. Sterba asks his readers to imagine that "there were among us persons with superhuman powers for making our societies more just than they are. Suppose comic book and cinematic persons like Superman, Wonder Woman, Spider-Man, and Xena really did exist. What would we expect of them?"<sup>5</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 26. Mackie concedes that some logical inferences must be made about some of the relevant terms but concludes that these are logically and necessarily following from the definitions of these terms.

<sup>3</sup> Both Nelson Pike ("Hume on Evil," *The Problem of Evil*, eds. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 39—52,) and Alvin Plantinga ("God, Evil, and the Metaphysics of Freedom," *The Problem of Evil*, eds. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 83—109) argue this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>5</sup> James P. Sterba, *Is a Good God Logically Possible?* (Springer, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2019), 19.

quoting the Spider-Man mantra, Sterba expects a lot, “with great power, there must also come great responsibility.”<sup>6</sup> Sterba believes that this logic applies to God as well. For God is a mighty and powerful being who should be upheld by a similar standard as the superheroes. For Sterba, this argument by analogy presents two problems for those relying on classical solutions to the problem of evil.

Firstly, in opposition to Plantinga’s free-will defense, Sterba is concerned with how it could be that God might permit evils that limit the exercise of freedom in other creatures. He asks, “Why then, in the actual world, couldn’t God, like the superheroes in our fictional world, be more involved in preventing evils that result in the loss of significant freedom for their victims?”<sup>7</sup> That is, even given that libertarian freedom is incredibly valuable to God (so much so that God would tolerate evil as a consequence of libertarian freedom), it still becomes challenging to understand why God would allow evils that prevent the exercise of freedom such as slavery, extreme abuse, or concentration camps. For if freedom is so valuable to God, then why allow freedom to be so frequently defeated by evils in our world?

Secondly, Sterba is concerned with the lack of justification in Plantinga’s defense. He states, “Plantinga needs to provide a greater good justification, or possible justification, particularly for God’s permitting significant and especially horrendous evil consequences of wrongdoing other than by simply appealing to the freedom of the wrongdoers, given that these are consequences that God, and you or I on occasion, could easily prevent.”<sup>8</sup> Here Sterba attempts to prevent the common shift of blame associated with the Free-Will defense and other classical solutions to the problem of evil. He insists that since God could have easily prevented many horrendous evils from occurring but chooses not to, it is necessary for a greater goods justification to be provided. Sterba is not insisting that every instance of evil be prevented in this world, rather, he insists that there are horrendous evils that seemingly could have been (and in his view, *should* have been) prevented but were not.

### Horrendous Evils and Adams

Adams agrees with Sterba in that she maintains that classical solutions (like the Free-Will defense) to the problem of evil fail to address horrendous evils in a satisfactory way. However, her approach varies drastically from Sterba’s. Based on her definition of horrendous evils articulated above, Adams insists that

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<sup>6</sup> Sterba, *Logically Possible*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

“This definition of the category of horrendous evils spawns a pair of distinctions (i) between two dimensions of Divine goodness in relation to creation—namely, ‘producer of global goods’ and ‘goodness to or love of individual created persons’—and (ii) between the overbalance/defeat of evil by good on the global scale, and the overbalance/defeat of evil by good within the context of an individual person’s life.”<sup>9</sup>

For Adams, these distinctions constitute different ways of evaluating the problem of evil entirely. One may evaluate the problem globally, or one may evaluate it individualistically.

Drawing from her distinctions, four principles regarding God’s goodness may be drawn to better summarize her perspective on the problem of horrendous evils.

Universal Goodness Principle (UGP): On the whole, God has produced global goods.

Individual Goodness Principle (IGP): Within the context of any individual person’s life, God has been good to that individual.

Universal Defeat Principle (UDP): Evil, on the whole, is overbalanced/defeated by God’s goodness.

Individual Defeat Principle (IDP): Evil, within the context of each individual person’s life, is overbalanced/defeated by God’s goodness.

Adams insists that classical solutions fail because they only account for the problem of evil in a global context. Classical solutions articulate how global goods (such as freedom) have been produced by God (UGP), and they explain that this world is better as a result of these goods (UDP), and therefore they conclude that there is no problem of evil. However, Adams is concerned with how God has been good to individual people (IGP) and how God defeats evil in the context of individual’s lives (IDP). Illustrating the weakness of global solutions, she asks, “Could a truck-driver who accidentally runs over his beloved child find consolation in the idea that this middle-known but unintended side-effect was part of the price God accepted for a world with the best balance of moral good over moral evil he could get?”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it seems difficult for the global solutions to make sense of such a scenario. Something else is needed. Thus, any solution to the problem of horrendous evils in this world must account for evil at an

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<sup>9</sup> Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 29–30.

<sup>10</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God,” *The Problem of Evil*, eds. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 214.

individual level as well as at the global level. Any solution that fails to do so is incomplete.

### The Goodness of God and Evil

Adams' solution to the problem of horrendous evils is based on the idea that "[t]he worst evils demand to be defeated by the best goods. Horrendous evils can be overcome only by the goodness of God... This result coheres with basic Christian intuition: that the powers of darkness are stronger than humans, but they are no match for God!"<sup>11</sup> In the context of the individual/global perspective on evil, Adams maintains that "[d]ivine goodness to created persons involves the distribution of harms and benefits, not merely globally, but also within the context of the individual person's life. At a minimum, God's goodness to human individuals would require that God guarantee each a life that was a great good to him/her on the whole by balancing off serious evils."<sup>12</sup> Although the argument is fairly straightforward, there are a number of key elements to Adams' theodicy that must be emphasized.

Firstly, it is imperative to Adams' theodicy that God is an incommensurate good that outweighs all experiences of evil in this world. Adams writes, "I maintain that – instrumental considerations aside – God has the capital to compensate humans for horror participation because the metaphysical excellence that Godhead is, is incommensurately valuable; apt relation to it will be incommensurately good for individual horror participants."<sup>13</sup> On this view, the immeasurable goodness of God Himself, and therefore union with Him, is the highest possible good. Moreover, this highest possible good of union with God simply outweighs any horrendous evil by nature of the immense goodness.

Secondly, it is important to understand what Adams means when she argues that evils are *defeated* by God. Although she sometimes uses 'defeat' and 'overcome/overbalance' interchangeably, Adams does seem to have a technical difference at times. In her *Christ and Horrors*, she explains that "balancing off of horrors does not confer any positive meaning on them."<sup>14</sup> However, defeat "involves a relation of organic unity between... the part and the whole."<sup>15</sup> Adams' ingenious idea here skirts the line between being a classical greater-good theodicy and being *merely* a compensatory theodicy. For Adams does not assert that God requires or causes great evils in order to create some further good as classical

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<sup>11</sup> Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," 220.

<sup>12</sup> Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 31.

<sup>13</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, "Ignorance, Instrumentality, Compensation, and the Problem of Evil," *Sophia* 52, no. 2 (April 2013), 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Idem.*, *Christ and Horrors* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46.

<sup>15</sup> Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 46.

greater good theodicies do.<sup>16</sup> Thereby, she avoids the problems associated with many greater-good theodicies outlined by some critics.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, by appealing to an organic unity between the evils and the goodness that defeats them (union with God), there remains a non-instrumental connection between those evils and goods.

The final key element to explore in Adams' theodicy is that of the mechanics of how God's incommensurate goodness is to defeat horrendous evils. Here, Adams argues that this can be done "only by integrating participation in horrendous evils into a person's relationship with God."<sup>18</sup> Throughout her many works, Adams outlines numerous ways that God could accomplish the integration of horrendous sufferings into intimate personal relationship with God. There are innumerable ways that an omniscient, omnipotent, and incredibly resourceful God could do this. Some of her proposed solutions include (i) understanding evils as a way to have personal intimacy with God;<sup>19</sup> (ii) receiving divine gratitude from God on behalf of the suffering experienced;<sup>20</sup> (iii) participating in healing and restoration of one's own meaning-making activities;<sup>21</sup> (iv) and, most importantly, horrendous evils allow one to intimately identify with Christ in His own horrific suffering on the cross on behalf of humanity.<sup>22</sup> In all these ways, and others, God is able to defeat evils experienced by each and every person by integrating them into relationship with Him, the very source of all goodness.

### **Sterba Against Adams' Theodicy**

Although Sterba agrees with Adams' against classical (global) solutions to the problem of horrendous evil, Sterba is also critical of Adams' theodicy. Specifically, Sterba marshals two objections to Adams' theodicy. One is a charge against the possibility of God using evils to bring about goods by arguing for what he calls the "Pauline Principle." The other is directed at showing that horrendous evils cannot be "organically unified" and defeated by the goodness of God.

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<sup>16</sup> Adams make this point explicit: "God is not a good for which horrors are instrumentally necessary. . . Neither are horrors instrumentally necessary for a creature's beatific intimacy with God. Creatures could enjoy that even if they never were individual horror participants. Beatific intimacy with God is not a goal for the sake of which horrors are tolerated as the price" (Adams, "Ignorance, Instrumentality, Compensation," 19).

<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of objections to classic greater-good theodicies, see Bruce A. Little, *God, Why This Evil?* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2010), 58—79.

<sup>18</sup> Adams, "Horrendous Evils," 218.

<sup>19</sup> Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> Adams, "Horrendous Evils," 219.

<sup>21</sup> Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 47—48.

<sup>22</sup> Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 164—68.



### Adams and the Pauline Principle

Sterba's first objection is grounded in his emphasizing of the Pauline Principle (referring to Rom. 3:8)—namely, “that we should never do evil that good may come of it.”<sup>23</sup> For Sterba this applies to God as much as any moral agent. Thus, according to Sterba, many solutions to the problem of horrendous evils fail because they insist that God does in fact do (or allow) evil so that some greater good may obtain, which, assuming the principle, is an evil that must be accounted for, returning to the problem at hand. Philosopher Andrew Gleeson makes a similar argument to Sterba, stating the problem as an analogy: “Loving parents cannot even countenance the idea of their children going to Auschwitz for the sake of greater goods. This remains just as true if we add that the children will receive the glorious compensation Adams supposes.”<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately for Adams' critics, this argument will not stick to Adams' theodicy for numerous reasons.

First, there are many reservations by commentators about applying conventional moral norms and obligations to God in the way that Sterba does. This would certainly be Adams' own take on this objection, following from medieval tradition.<sup>25</sup> Daniel Rubio summarizes Adams' views on this matter, stating that “Adams denies that God has any obligations concerning creatures because of the ‘size gap’ between them.”<sup>26</sup> For Adams, this “places God outside of the network of rights and obligations that constitute morality as commonly understood.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, there should at least be some hesitation to so quickly apply moral principles that apply to humans directly to God.

Second, even if the Pauline Principle is applied to God, it does not seem promising for Sterba and his adherents. As Stephen Davis has noted, by imposing the Pauline Principle on God, “Sterba argues that a perfectly good and all-powerful being must prevent rather than allow the consequences of all significant and especially horrendous evils. Indeed, he says, it would be morally wrong for such a being not to do so.”<sup>28</sup> However, as Davis points out, a world where God is morally obligated to prevent evil would result in God *always* preventing evil

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<sup>23</sup> Sterba, *Logically Possible*, 44.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Gleeson, “Horrendous Evils and the Loving God: A Reply to Joshua Thurow,” *Sophia* 61 (November 2021), 419.

<sup>25</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, “The Problem of Hell,” in *Reasoned Faith* ed. Eleonore Stump (New Haven, CT: Cornell University Press, 1993), 308.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Rubio, “Against the New Logical Argument from Evil,” *Religions* 14, no. 159 (January 2023), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Rubio, “New Logical Argument,” 3.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen T. Davis, “Why God Cannot Do What Sterba Wants,” *Religions* 13, no. 10, 943 (October 2022), 3.

which compromises some of God's purposes in this world.<sup>29</sup> For how then could God create moral agents that learn virtue, practice soul-making, or develop meaningful free-choices? Further problems for Sterba abound. Christian philosopher Eric Reitan has pointed out that Sterba's Pauline Principle, if applied to God, would prevent God from restricting a free-agent's choices since the restriction of freedom would constitute as an evil.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, God would never be able to restrict evil (even if restricting it were to produce a good, according to the principle itself) that was brought about by freedom.

Finally, there is a problem with whether the principle applies to Adams' theodicy at all. For Adams' theodicy is not a common greater-goods theodicy. As mentioned above, Adams insists that the horrendous evils experienced in this life are not instrumental in bringing about the compensatory goods. Thus, Adams does not argue at all that God "does evil so that good may come." Rather, she argues that God brings about goodness in the lives of those who experience them.

#### Adams and God's Goodness

Sterba's second objection is that compensation of the sort that Adams talks about is logically impossible. Sterba most clearly articulates this in one of his responses to critics:

Any goods that are not logically connected to God's permission of horrendous evil consequences of wrongdoing would be goods that God could and should have provided without permitting especially horrendous evil consequences... for any goods that are logically connected to God's permission of horrendous evil consequences, the would-be beneficiaries of those goods would morally prefer that God had prevented the consequences rather than that they be provided with those goods.<sup>31</sup>

Here, a dilemma of sorts is offered by Sterba. Either 1) the goodness of God is not logically connected to the evils suffered (in which case the goods should be given without the evils), or 2) the goodness of God is logically connected to the evils suffered (in which case the subject experiencing the evils and benefitting from the goods would simply decline the evils and the goods as well). Implicit in this response is the idea that some horrendous evils outweigh the possible goodness of God, since Sterba assumes one would reject union with God if it were logically entailed with horrendous evils.

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<sup>29</sup> Davis, "Why God Cannot," 3.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Reitan, "Divine Omnipotence, Divine Sovereignty and Moral Constraints on the Prevention of Evil: A Reply to Sterba," *Religions* 13, no. 9, 813 (August 2022), 6–8.

<sup>31</sup> James P. Sterba, "Sixteen Contributors: A Response," *Religions* 12, no. 7, 536 (July 2021), 11.

### *Whys and Hows in Theodicy*

The first problem for Sterba is that the idea that horrendous evils outweigh God's goodness is a dubious claim indeed. Jerry Walls points out that "[t]here simply is no way to compare or measure the joy of this supreme good with finite goods or evils. The beauty and goodness of God as experienced 'up close' is of such incomparable value that it will utterly swamp any evils we might have experienced."<sup>32</sup> What seems to be the case is that Sterba cannot *imagine* a scenario in which some horrific evils could be defeated the way Adams talks about, but this is not a problem for the theodicy. As philosopher Michael Beaty points out regarding God's method at defeating evils, "Our grasp of them is incomplete, partial, and subject to error. Finally, we do not expect to know them, in any exhaustive way... we Christian Theists insist that a good God can compensate those who suffer evils, horrendous or otherwise... but I don't presume to be able to grasp those in any comprehensive and exhaustive fashion."<sup>33</sup> Adam's argument is not an attempt to demonstrate why horrendous evils exist at all. Rather, her purpose is to explain away the weightiness of the problem of horrendous evils. She does so by articulating how, despite the existence and experience of horrendous evils, God is immeasurably good on both a global and, far more importantly, on an individual level. One may still object that the experience of horrendous evils in one's life goes unexplained, but the objection loses its force overall since, assuming the truth of Adams' arguments, God has been good to each and every person—even those that have experienced great evils.

Here, the book of Job provides some of the deepest insights into the problem of evil. Sterba complains against Adams' theodicy by stating that what "Adams does not take up is the question of how an all-good God could have allowed the horrendously evil consequences of serious wrongdoing to be inflicted on innocent victims in the first place."<sup>34</sup> This complaint mirrors the complaint of the Bible student who finds only dissatisfaction at the conclusion of the book of Job. For God never explains to Job why Job suffered. Yet *Job himself* found meaning in his suffering and repents of his complaints towards God. For it was because of his suffering and complaints that he meets with God, and this was

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<sup>32</sup> Jerry Walls, "Heaven and the Goodness of God," *Religions* 12, no. 5, 316 (April 2021), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Beaty, "A Compensatory Response to the Problem of Evil: Revisited," *Religions* 14, no. 1, 35 (December 2022), 11.

<sup>34</sup> James P. Sterba, "Conclusions," in *Ethics and the Problem of Evil*, ed. James P. Sterba (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 155.

enough for Job (Jb. 42:5—6). Sterba cannot protest that Job's suffering goes unexplained; even Job does not make this charge.

Sterba's issue with Adams' theodicy stems partly from the fact that Sterba wants to ask, "Why does this evil occur?" whereas Adams' argument answers "How can God still be good given evil?" The first question is often unanswerable. John Hare, commenting on both the problem of evil and the book of Job says, "We will not get a theodicy in the sense of God's reason for allowing some particular ill (such as Job's). That would extend beyond the proper limits of our knowledge."<sup>35</sup> Adams explains that God's reasons (why's) for our suffering may be simply beyond our ability to understand them, like a parent attempting to explain to her three-year old why he must experience the pain of a surgery.<sup>36</sup> God's speech to Job illustrates this point well. Job just cannot understand the world from God's perspective, but that is not the task of a theodicy. Instead, theodicy demonstrates *how* there can be a good God, even in the face of horrendous evils.

### *Adams' Theodicy as a Key to Greater Goods*

There is another solution to Sterba's objection as well. However, this solution differs in that it relies on understanding Adams' theodicy as a foundational piece for all other theodicies. If one takes seriously Adams' claim that God truly does have the ability to overcome even the most horrific evils, then it becomes clear that God might allow evil to exist to achieve some other end, since the weightiness of horrendous evils can be defeated later. Reitan explains:

This is possible because of God's infinite capacity to redeem the lives of those caught up in even the most horrific moral evils. That God can effectively erase the evil from the world after it has occurred by fully redeeming it (something none of us can do) could arguably entail that preventing the evil from happening in the first place no longer functions as a sufficient justification for violating the prima facie prohibition against freedom-constraining acts.<sup>37</sup>

God may choose not to restrict human freedom because freedom is a great good, but (as Sterba insists), since freedom is often abused by humans to produce horrendous evils, God seems obliged to restrict it in some cases. However, since

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<sup>35</sup> John Hare, "Kant, Job, and the Problem of Evil," in *Ethics and the Problem of Evil*, ed. James P. Sterba (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 38.

<sup>36</sup> Adams, "Horrendous Evils," 217.

<sup>37</sup> Reitan, "Divine Omnipotence," 10.

God can restore/redeem/defeat any evils experienced, God can allow moral evil, knowing it will be done away with later.

This point above demonstrates how Adams' theodicy is foundational to many other theodicies. For all greater-good theodicies and free-will theodicies rely on God valuing something over and above the evils that must be endured for the good. However, by adapting Adams' theodicy into other theodicies, it becomes clear that God may allow the evils to exist because He knows that He is able to defeat them eventually.<sup>38</sup> That is, Adams' theodicy allows one to have greater-goods (whether freedom, soul-making, etc.) because on her view, God can repair all the damage, eventually leaving all the goods remaining with all the evils defeated.

The important idea here is that Adams' theodicy is not a greater-good theodicy in itself—as has already been made clear. Rather, the idea is that Adams' theodicy is key to the coherence of other greater-good theodicies. For greater-good theodicies posit the following logical progression:

1. God wants to bring about some great good, (G).
2. God's bringing about (G) would have the consequent of some evil, (E).
3. The benefits of (G) outweigh the damages of (E).

For those holding to greater-good theodicies, this sort of progression is sufficient to assuage God of the problem of evil. However, Adams' theodicy offers a fourth proposition to this progression that makes greater good theodicies even more robust:

4. God will defeat/redeem all damage caused by (E).

With the addition of 4, the arguments for greater goods become more convincing, it seems. However, a defense of greater-good theodicies is beyond the reaches of this paper. The important application for this paper is in response to Sterba's dilemma above. For there is a third horn to this dilemma. That is, it could be the case that the goodness of God that compensates individuals and defeats evils in their life is distinct from the instrumental goods that are logically connected to evils themselves. For if the bringing about of some instrumental good results in a horrendous evil, it is not the consequential, instrumental good that defeats the evil; rather it is God and His goodness.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Adams' theodicy seems to be a key to developing many other theodicies.

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<sup>38</sup> Adams explores another theodicy in the writings of Julian of Norwich in "Julian of Norwich: Problems of Evil and the Seriousness of Sin," *Sophia* 39, no. 2 (September 2011), 433—447.

<sup>39</sup> Beaty makes a similar observation in "Compensatory Response," 9.

### Conclusion

The problem of horrendous evils, as argued by Sterba, has been outlined and evaluated. Adams' theodicy has been shown to remain strong in the philosopher's arsenal against the problem of evil. Furthermore, it has also been demonstrated that Adams' theodicy is supplemental to the cogency of other theodicies. Although Sterba's application of the problem of horrendous evils offers a unique and fresh approach, the challenges he poses do not create major problems for Adams' own solution to the problem of horrendous evils. Adams' theodicy guarantees that God can be understood as good to all persons individually, which disarms the problem of evil at its core. For if God is good to each person, then the weightiness of the problem of evil seems to fade, even if the reasons for evil elude those who experience them. Sterba's attempt to employ his Pauline Principle fails for numerous reasons. In principle, it is difficult to apply such moral principles to God, and even if it were to apply to God, it seems a self-defeating principle. Moreover, it is difficult to see how the principle applies to Adams compensatory theodicy at all. Furthermore, Sterba's dilemma against Adams fundamentally misunderstands what her argument attempts to demonstrate and therefore also misses a third and elegant solution to Sterba's dilemma. Thus, Adams is correct in her belief that Christians can remain confident in understanding *how* God can be good despite not knowing *why* many evils exist.

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