

## Salvation in Loss: The Relational Theodicy

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In philosophy of religion, one of the main areas of inquiry has been the problem of evil. Essentially this is the problem that an all-powerful and all good God is inconsistent with the evil that is observed in the world. “If God is perfectly loving, God must wish to abolish all evil; and if God is all-powerful, God must be able to abolish all evil. But evil exists; therefore God cannot be both omnipotent and perfectly loving”.<sup>1</sup> The response to this problem is what has come to be known as theodicy, from the Greek for God’s justice. According to some philosophers the responses so far have tended to fall into two traditions, the so-called free will and soul-making theodicies. This response to the problem of evil will seek to find the middle way between the two traditional responses, incorporating the best of them both in a new and unique approach. The relational theodicy paints a picture of humankind, not so tragically fallen as the free-will response, or as far from final perfection as in the soul-making response, but rather existing inseparably from some sort of deficiency or suffering, as these serve as a constant reminder and stimulus for us to live as the beings that we are.

The project of theodicy itself is inherently relational. It speaks of the relationship between humans and the divine, between our conceptions of justice and that of the ultimate base of reality. If there is a God, many gods, or simply a governing principle that is all good and the problem of evil persuades us, occupying our full attention, then our relationship with the divine being(s) is at least hampered and at most severed. The response to suffering is one of the most important things to consider, for suffering seems to be a near ever-present part of our experience, meaning that the problem of evil is

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<sup>1</sup> John Hick, Philosophy of Religion (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963), 39-40.

always poignant. Also it is often an exercise in allocating blame, to oneself, one's fellow humans, or to fate: the nature of the universe or a governing God. The problem of evil is a questioning into the justification for this world over other imagined worlds, an inquiry into why what is should be as it is rather than as something else. It is for these reasons that the problem of evil remains so powerful in human consciousness, and that its answer is of great importance.

For the problem of evil to be understood in its full force, it must be expanded, abandoning even the label, 'the problem of evil.' The problem has often been expanded and called 'the problem of suffering,' which includes not only moral evil (suffering caused by the freely chosen acts of moral agents), but also natural evil (the suffering that results from tornados, earthquakes, other natural disasters, and in general, all human interaction with the uncontrollable natural world). For the purposes of this discussion, the problem, will be expanded even further to include deficiency as a kind of suffering, the kind felt by contingent and unactualized beings. But before ample discussion of the relational theodicy occurs, it is necessary to discuss relationships and the thing that they are founded on, namely love.

Love is itself a potentially messy concept, and it could perhaps be very foolish to try to come to a definitive answer to the problem of evil by wading into the quagmire of asking 'What is love?' But if relationships are to serve as the central and morally sufficient reason that an all-powerful and all good God has in allowing evil, then this concept must be explored. Love has come to mean many things for many different people, everything from the surging emotional feeling that two people experience when they first start becoming romantically involved, to something that is much more rational

and ethical. The broadness of love should not be intimidating, and neither side of it should be thrown out. This discussion will seek to unearth the foundation or essence of the concept of love that both of the previous conceptions have in common rather than the specific character of what we distinguish as different loves.

Nishida Kitarō, a Japanese Zen-Buddhist philosopher, asserts that knowledge and love are essentially the same thing. They are both a uniting of the subject with the object, or the self with the other. He says,

To love something is to cast away the self and unite with that other. When self and other join together with no gap between them, true feelings of love first arise... The love between a parent and a child comes forth only when the parent becomes the child and the child becomes the parent. Because the parent becomes the child, the parent feels each of the child's gains or losses as his or her own; and because the child becomes the parent, the child feels as his or her own each instance of joy or sadness on the part of the parent. The more we discard the self and become purely objective or selfless, the greater and deeper our love becomes. We advance from the love between parent and child or husband and wife to the love between friends, and from there to the love of humankind. The Buddha's love extended even to birds, beasts, grasses, and trees.<sup>2</sup>

The true essence of love is found in a kind of self-negation. This negation should not be understood as a complete annihilation or elimination of everything which is contained within the concept of self. For what would remain if this occurred? What relationship could occur? For the purposes of this discussion, self-negation will instead mean a kind of minimization of the self in regard to the object of love; a loss of egoistic and selfish desires, aspirations, and conceptions, for the salvation of a genuine relationship with the other. Nishida says, "Because our infinite spirit is never fundamentally satisfied by the unity constituted by an individual self, it seeks a larger unity, a great self that envelops

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<sup>2</sup> Nishida Kitarō, An Inquiry Into the Good, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 174.

both oneself and others”.<sup>3</sup> In love the self is not negated in the strict sense because it is incorporated into the relation, or what Nishida calls a great self.

Jesus also talks of love as a kind of self-negation, saying, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”.<sup>4</sup> In this statement, the sacrificing of one’s life does not just exemplify a love that is greater than any other as in some sort of hierarchy of love, but also that there is nothing closer to what love is than what occurs when someone sacrifices him or herself for another. And if love for another is tied to a loss or negation of the self, it is no wonder that Jesus also says, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”<sup>5</sup> Jesus advocates the loss or negation of life in one sense for a much fuller and actualized life; a life that humans were meant to have.

Another clarifying way to look at love as self-negation, and what is meant by self-negation, is by exploring Taoist metaphor. Chapter 8 of the *Lao Tzu* or *Tao-te Ching* says,

The best (man) is like water.  
Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete with them.  
It dwells in (lowly) places that all disdain.  
This is why it is so near to Tao.  
[The best man] in his dwelling loves the earth.  
In his heart, he loves what is profound.  
In his associations, he loves humanity.  
In his words, he loves faithfulness.  
In government, he loves order.  
In handling affairs, he loves competence.  
In his activities, he loves timeliness.

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<sup>3</sup> Nishida, *An Inquiry Into the Good*, 82.

<sup>4</sup> John 15:12-13 NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 16:25-26 NRSV.

It is because he does not compete that he is without reproach.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Chapter 34 speaks of the flowing of the Tao like water.

The Great Tao flows everywhere.

It may go left or right.

All things depend on it for life, and it does not turn away from them.

It accomplishes its task, but does not claim credit for it.

It clothes and feeds all things but does not claim to be master over them.

Always without desires, it may be called The Small.

All things come to it and it does not master them; it may be called The Great.

Therefore (the sage) never strives himself for the great, and thereby the great is achieved.<sup>7</sup>

Water is such a fitting analogy for what is meant by self-negation because although water gives way to the foreign substances that it encounters it is not itself destroyed. If a rock is dropped into a stream, the water at once gives way, accommodating the rock as it quickly makes its way to the stream bottom. The water flows over every square inch of the rock's surface, intuiting every crack and irregularity. This property of water is applicable to the landscape that the stream flows across as well as any object that invades its realm. Water, "dwells in (lowly) places that all disdain," as in the bottom of valleys in marshes and estuaries, rather than the tops of hills and mountains. The non-competition that epitomizes water is the essential feature of love as self-negation, because a person who loves, "benefits all things and does not compete with them," and, "clothes and feeds all things but does not claim to be master over them." Love is a unifying act because it is in love that a person as water and another person or the environment as the stone are most closely and intimately connected, with no separation, and no need for either to overcome the other.

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<sup>6</sup> Wing-Tsit Chan, A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 143.

<sup>7</sup> Chan, 157.

Love is thought of as quite an emotional experience, and it may surprise the reader to think of love as a kind of loss of the self or self-negation. Because love is seen as so closely connected with feelings, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber is careful to distinguish love from the feelings that are commonly felt when it is present.

Feelings accompany the metaphysical and metapsychical fact of love, but they do not constitute it; and the feelings that accompany it can be very different. Jesus' feeling for the possessed man is different from his feeling for the beloved disciple; but the love is one. Feelings one "has"; love occurs... Love does not cling to an I, as if the You were merely its "content" or object; it is between I and You.<sup>8</sup>

For Buber, humans speak two words in their interaction with the world, which includes the natural world, other humans, and God. The two basic words are I-It and I-You. I-It is the word that is spoken between the self and the objects of its experience. Thus, whenever a subject/object distinction is in place, someone is speaking the word I-It. On the other hand, I-You is the word of relation; when it is spoken the self or I does not have any object in mind but is instead faced with a You. The You is an other that dominates the consciousness of the self or I, revealing itself rather than being revealed. The You of the basic word I-You is an exclusive You, one that dominates the attention of the I.

Buber says,

I contemplate a tree. I can accept it as a picture... I can feel it as movement... I can assign it to a species... I can overcome its uniqueness... I can dissolve it into a number... Throughout all of this the tree remains my object... But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me... When I confront a human being as my You... then he is no thing among things nor does he consist in things... Neighborless and seamless, he is You and fills the firmament. Not as if there were nothing but he; but everything else lives in *his* light.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 66.

<sup>9</sup> Buber, I and Thou, 57-59.

I-You occurs between the two, binding them in relation, while I-It is dependent on a strong self, one that is not negated. For Buber, “The basic word I-It is made possible only by this recognition, by the detachment of the I. The former word splits into I and You, but it did not originate as their aggregate, it antedates any I. The latter originated as an aggregate of I and It, it postdates the I”.<sup>10</sup> Thus self-negation, and love as a type of self-negation, corresponds with Buber’s basic word I-You. It amounts to the relinquishing of the detached I for the more primal I, the one that antedates the separation that comes with I-It.

The I of the I-You relation is somewhat different than simply the I itself. In the Taoist water metaphor, when the rock enters the water, the water still exists, but its flow pattern changes as it accepts and covers the rock. The water touches every surface. Buber says of the You that “everything else lives in *his* light,” which is exactly how it is with water. When things enter water, the very flow and place of the water changes in the “light” of the You. In love, there is a loss of what Buber calls the detached I, or what Nishida calls the subjective self. When one speaks I-You, one engages in love as self-negation. This love is not the act of an I or a single person, but a love that transcends the subject/object barrier. It brings two distinct entities together in the mutual bonds of relationship.

The human that does not negate the self to unite with others in love is not a human for Buber, but rather an ego. This type of person, for whom there are only objects, even makes him or herself an object, focusing on an apparition of the self rather than the true self. Buber says,

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<sup>10</sup> Buber, I and Thou, 73-74.

The ego... wallows in his being-that-way – or rather for the most part in the fiction of his being-that-way – a fiction that he has devised for himself. For at bottom self-knowledge usually means to him the fabrication of an effective apparition of the self that has the power to deceive him ever more thoroughly; and through the contemplation and veneration of this apparition one seeks the semblance of knowledge of one's own being-that-way, while actual knowledge of it would lead one to self-destruction – or rebirth.<sup>11</sup>

The self's fulfillment and actuality itself is bound up in its ability to relate to others, a relation characterized by an overturning of the I that represents the ego rather than the person.

Love is essentially the phenomenological method at work in relationships. One places the self in doubt (brackets the self) to thereby unite with the essence of the other. This kind of phenomenology is strongly at work in Buber's writings. When he talks of the relation formed by speaking the basic word I-You, he is talking of letting go of the detached I. When one negates the self in order to unite with the essence of non-personal things (which could include the behaviors etc. of people as well as the rest of the natural world), one practices phenomenology in the traditional sense, and the result is knowledge. Whereas, when one unites with other personal beings through self-negation the result is love. This picture is strikingly similar to Nishida's ideas. "People usually think that knowledge and love are entirely different mental activities. To me, however, they are fundamentally the same. This activity is the union of subject and object; it is the activity in which the self unites with things".<sup>12</sup> Connection with both non-personal and personal entities and beings is dependent upon a kind of loss of the self, or self-negation.

If there is no unity in love, no transcending from simply the self and its desires to an inclusion of and emphasis on the other for itself, then all that is left is for each person

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<sup>11</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 114.

<sup>12</sup> Nishida, *An Inquiry Into the Good*, 173.



to impose his or her will on the external world and all the other people that it contains. Such a person is alone in a world of mere things. As Buber says, “The I of the basic word I-It, the I that is not bodily confronted by a You but surrounded by a multitude of ‘contents,’ has only a past and no present. In other words insofar as a human being makes do with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no presence. He has nothing but objects”.<sup>13</sup> In the absence of a self-negating love each person is inherently alone.

At this point the foundation for the discussion of the problem of evil itself is finally set. The morally sufficient reason for which evil exists in the world of God’s creation manifests itself in the question: would God create contingent beings (beings dependent on God for both their very existence and fulfillment/actualization) that were unaware of the fact of their contingency? The answer is of course not. If humans were not aware of their insufficiency, they could never enter into relationships with God or each other. The world contains suffering because suffering is essential to a world in which relationships are both possible and encouraged to occur. Relationships are possible because distinct entities exist, or in other words, because there is a genuine self and other. And relationships are encouraged to occur because natural evil generally and deficiency specifically break down the self, bringing each person closer to union with the other in love and knowledge.

The existence of a genuine self and other (I and You) is dependent upon the self’s freedom. Freedom is not manifest in the number of options at one’s disposal,

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<sup>13</sup> Buber, I and Thou, 63-64.

but rather the fact that each person will determine the course of his or her activities.<sup>14</sup>

This potential to determine the course of one's projects, endeavors, and relations seems inseparably related to one's awareness of the self or I. The self exists in consciousness as the entity that decides between x, y, z, or whatever set of possible courses of action face the self; in other words the self inherently exists in consciousness as a free being. The choice of how the self will act in regards to the others of its existence is directly related to the differentiation of the self from others by means of I-it. Thus freedom is manifest in what Buber would call a "twofold" existence, attitude, or relation to the world. "No human being is pure person, and none is pure ego; none is entirely actual, none entirely lacking in actuality. Each lives in a twofold I".<sup>15</sup> The twofold existence allows humans to either join with the world, others, and God by speaking I-You, or to interact with everything as if it were really every thing, through I-It. The more that the I of I-You constitutes one's self and one's interaction with the exterior or the other, the more one is a person rather than an ego.

Beings incapable of speaking the I of I-It are beings that seem to lack self-consciousness as well as the ability to enter into relationships with an other. The other does not exist for them because they are completely unaware of the other's otherness. They lack the distinction between the self and other, and are thus at once united with the object of their direct experience. Such beings are much like animals in that the objects of direct experience constitute the self in its entirety. On the other hand, beings that possess an I but that never speak the word of separation are beings which at once can exclusively

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<sup>14</sup> This freedom is much more akin to that of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty sees even the impossibility of climbing a rock face as an act of freedom, because only a person who chooses to make such a thing his or her project in the first place is capable of coming to such a conclusion.

<sup>15</sup> Buber, I and Thou, 114.

focus on each and every You, or beings in which every You is at once united. Such a being is what has been called God, or the ultimate base of reality. Beings which dwell in the twofold I are beings which are aware of the self as distinct from the other through the differentiation and separation of I-It, while still being capable of an exclusive unity with the other through I-You. Thus the twofold existence is necessary for relationships, because it results in a genuine self and other. The twofold existence is composed of both I-You and I-It. Both are necessary and important, even though it is the I-You which constitutes the unifying act of love and knowledge.

The word I-It, while it is the word of separation, spoken between a subject and an object or a self and a thing that it experiences, is necessary for survival. As such, I-it is just as necessary for union and true self-actualization as the word I-You. Buber says, "In all the seriousness of truth, listen: without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human".<sup>16</sup> Without I-It, a person could never procure the food, clothes, and shelter that he or she needs for the nourishment and care of the physical body. Even two lovers who enjoy a sunset together from a bench in the park, sure that the whole world exists solely as a frame to the picture of their relationship, rely on I-It to decide which restaurant they are going to go to after the sun finally disappears behind the trees. The unity and exclusivity of the You must give way to the It, to a self that views objects and thus chooses which objects will nourish the body and how such objects will be procured. "This is part of the basic truth of the human world: only It can be put in order. Only as things cease to be our You and become our It do they become subject to coordination. The You knows no system of coordinates".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Buber, I and Thou, 85.

<sup>17</sup> Buber, I and Thou, 81.

The exercise of I-It itself then is not what results in moral evil. “Man’s will to profit and will to power are natural and legitimate as long as they are tied to the will to human relations and carried by it. There is no evil drive until the drive detaches itself from our being; the drive that is wedded to and determined by our being is the plasma of communal life, while the detached drive spells its disintegration”.<sup>18</sup> Moral evil does not result from I-It until I-it is spoken without any remembrance of I-You. When a person reduces everything to every thing, he or she denies his or her very nature, the nature to be in relationship with the world, others, and God. Thus, moral evil, along with all the suffering that comes with human freedom, results from a misuse of I-It. Once a person, or ego as Buber would call them, denies everything and everyone their status as a You and instead regards each and everyone as an It, he or she is capable of doing anything to them. This misuse does not follow from the existence of I-It, but is rather what happens when a person divorces him or herself from everything that they are and are meant to be.

“The self is neither angelic nor animal. It is, rather, a being that is intrinsically deluded. By a total overturning, the self discovers its religious nature in its own bottomlessly deluded depths”.<sup>19</sup> Humans are capable of disunity as well as unity. Despite all the crushing blows a person receives at the hands of the totality of his or her interaction with the external, he or she is still capable of choosing his or her own perceptions of reality rather than the reality that presents itself in relation. Thus the I is never strictly determined by all the things that influence it, for it can choose the fantasy of its own conceptions rather than accepting the other as it presents itself. Also, the freedom that accompanies the I-It relation aids in relationships because it is only when a

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<sup>18</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 97-98.

<sup>19</sup> Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 86.

person commits to a certain conception of the natural world that the world is able to rebel and demand that it be regarded as a genuine other or You. When other people, the natural world, and God do not fit the boxes that the self freely puts them in through I-It, they eventually and inevitably confront the self as a You that cannot be confined. The exercise of freedom underscores the otherness of the other, for the other will resist our attempts to limit it. Thus freedom and the twofold existence result in a genuine I as well as a genuine You; and an overturning of the self or relinquishing of the detached I is the basis of relationships between these genuine entities.

To explore how the suffering of natural evil and deficiency work to promote relationships, it is useful to look at an analogy between the natural world and the use of drugs. If someone were to say, “I love the cocaine, I love the cocaine,” it is conceivable that he or she is saying so from an imposing will; he or she loves the drug for the feeling and escape received. Such a person is not confronted with a You but rather with an It. However the drug consumes the person as drug use continues, progressing from a casual relationship to more of an addiction. The poison of the drug (physical poison as well as the effect it has on the brain, changing one’s entire psyche so that all one cares about is the drug and how to get more) renders the person almost a non-entity compared to the drug itself. At this point, utterances of “I love the cocaine, I love the cocaine” are not to be looked at as before. The self having arrived at negation, a negation enabled by the poison of the drug and the self’s own descent into addiction and hopelessness, now sincerely expresses love for the drug, because the drug is the only thing capable of making the person feel at all alive anymore. The drug is the one hope available to the person, a fact made evident by what such people are willing to do to get

it.<sup>20</sup> Many will say that this analogy is all wrong; that the comparison of the world with drugs and love with addiction is unwarranted. However, we often think of romantic love as an intoxication. And in many traditions religious life is also seen as a kind of intoxication.<sup>21</sup>

This serves as an analogy because the suffering that we receive from the natural world in both the form of natural evil and deficiency is the poison that breaks down the self, aiding in self-negation and thus in relationships. Suffering is the poison that renders our utterances of “I love” true and sincere. As interaction with the drug is the cause of the poison, so it is with the self and its relation to the world and God.

Because our infinite spirit is never fundamentally satisfied by the unity constituted by an individual self, it seeks a larger unity, a great self that envelops both oneself and others. We come to express sympathy toward others and seek congruence and unity between oneself and others. Our love for others is the demand for such a supra-individual unity with them. Accordingly, we feel greater peace and joy in love for others than in love for ourselves. God, the unity of the universe, is the base of this unifying activity, the foundation of our love, the source of our joy. God is infinite love, infinite joy, and peace.<sup>22</sup>

Each person suffers from a deficiency that manifests itself as a sort of loneliness. From the earliest age we can feel the effects of the poison. It calls on us to indulge our relational nature: to unite with others, to speak I-You. As this deficiency festers its call becomes more and more powerful. The suffering of loneliness, the despair of the solitary soul encourages us, beckons us to negate the self in order to unite with others, even as it continues to weaken the self that does not give in to its call. “The religious demand

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<sup>20</sup> For such a case study, see the movie *Requiem for a Dream*.

<sup>21</sup> The priests and poets of the *Ṛg Veda* in India utilized an intoxicating substance called *soma* in their practices as well as writing many praises to the god *Soma*. In Greek and Roman mythology Dionysus and Bacchus are the gods of wine. The mystical poetry of both Jalal al-Din Rumi and Hafiz reflects these themes in Islamic Sufism. Ephesians 5:18 encourages Christians to allow their actions to be motivated and controlled by the Holy Spirit rather than wine, a statement which establishes the connection between these two external motivating forces.

<sup>22</sup> Nishida, *An Inquiry Into the Good*, 82-83.

concerns the self as a whole, the life of the self. It is a demand in which the self, while perceiving its relativity and finitude, yearns to attain eternal, true life by uniting with an absolutely infinite power”.<sup>23</sup> This yearning is not possible without the oppressive perception of relativity and finitude which is the deficiency that causes suffering in us. “Human life as a specific entity... begins with the experience of chaos as a condition perceived in the soul”.<sup>24</sup> The beginning of the I-You relation and thus of love is suffering.

This story is very similar to the one that occurs between humans and the natural world as well. The natural evils that we face in the effort to survive call us into relationships with one another as well as the natural world itself. Without the danger of the natural world and the imminent threat to survival posed by natural disasters and the general laws of nature, scientific inquiry (the study of how the natural world works) would never have proceeded. Science is a kind of uniting with nature just as it is, although even science can threaten relationships by speaking only I-It to nature.<sup>25</sup> Every time we are faced with the limits of our knowledge or a natural disaster occurs, showing the full force and unhindered, unbridled power of nature, nature demands that we notice it as a You. And in so doing, natural evil causes us to unite with each other as well as a God. When a natural disaster occurs, the community affected both primarily and secondarily (through TV and other forms of vicarious experience) comes together in a way unheard of when everything was “fine” (when nature progressed according to human wishes and desires). In these situations people often turn to prayer and seek union with the divine as well. This is perhaps more evident from the study of ancient and primitive people, who

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<sup>23</sup> Nishida, *An Inquiry Into the Good*, 149.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Buber, *Good and Evil* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1952), 125.

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger calls such a move a reduction of nature to standing reserve.

were involved in much more of a struggle to survive, and almost all of whom had some conception of the divine as well as very tight communities. When faced with the full force of natural evil, or the suffering of trying to survive in a powerful and unpredictable natural world, human beings almost inevitably enter into relationships with one another, the divine, and the natural world itself.<sup>26</sup>

Relationships are the morally sufficient reason for which suffering occurs, and the possibility of relationships is dependent upon suffering. Natural evil and deficiency are suffering which encourage relationships to occur by promoting the self-negation that lies at the foundation of love. Buber says, “If this recollection of one’s falling off, of the deactualized and the actual I, were permitted to reach down to the roots that man calls despair and from which self-destruction and rebirth grow, this would be the beginning of the return”.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the twofold existence of man, an existence which is often abused resulting in moral evil, is essential to relationships. “The purpose of setting oneself apart is to experience and use, and the purpose of that is ‘living’ - which means dying one human life long. The purpose of relation is the relation itself- touching the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life”.<sup>28</sup> This “rebirth” and “breath of eternal life” that accompany relation through I-You justify the existence of suffering in all of its forms.

The relational theodicy is different than responses which rely mainly on the existence of human freedom for the justification of suffering, such as the Augustinian view, because not all suffering results from the misuse of human freedom. It seems very

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<sup>26</sup> The fertility cults and other agricultural and hunting gods and goddesses of ancient people, as well as the Gaia concept itself show that relation to the divine is often also relation to nature and vice versa.

<sup>27</sup> Buber, I and Thou, 110.

<sup>28</sup> Buber, I and Thou, 112-113.



hard to justify natural evil, especially when the concept is expanded to include deficiency by only pointing to the misuse of human freedom. Augustine's account seems to depend mainly on a certain interpretation of the Garden of Eden story and the fall of humanity, because it is this event that can be pointed to for all the suffering that exists. It was in that one instant that human freedom was abused resulting in every form of suffering that exists. A proponent of such a free-will account inevitably paints a picture in which all suffering is punishment in one way or another for human transgression. However, the book of Job in the Hebrew bible is sufficient to show that all suffering is not divine punishment. In the relational theodicy not all suffering is the result of misused human freedom. Instead the existence of suffering is necessary for the existence of relationships and acts as an impetus for them to occur.<sup>29</sup> Freedom and the twofold I are necessary for relationships because of the need for differentiation between the self and other, but freedom itself does not justify the existence of suffering.

At the same time, the relational theodicy is not the same as the soul-making or Irenaean response. The two are not the same because humans are not involved in a second stage of creation on our way to finally becoming what God intends for us to be. Suffering does exist so that we can become "sons and daughters of God," but becoming such is not a matter of gradual and eventual perfection. Instead we exist along with suffering. And suffering serves as a constant reminder to negate the self, thereby fulfilling our function as unifiers of reality. The apostle Paul says that God created

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<sup>29</sup> The traditional distinction between natural evil and moral evil is useful here. Deficiency and natural evil serve as the suffering essential to the existence and promotion of relationships, while moral evil results from the misuse of the I-It relation and the freedom that accompanies the existence of a genuine self (a self that is separate from the other). Thus the suffering that results from moral evil is not the suffering necessary for relationships but a consequence of people denying their own natures by reducing everything, including themselves, to a mere thing.

humans, “so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us”.<sup>30</sup> Existing as relational beings, or “sons and daughters of God,” is the same. Self-negation is the act by which relationships occur, an act which is not far from each one of us.

Empedocles talks of love and strife as both being bound up with one another and in a way inseparable. So it is as well with unity and disunity, for without a diverse and differentiated world, there would be nothing for humans, as unifiers of reality, to do. Without contradictions, no one would evaluate apparent conflicts to realize a higher or more profound truth (one that encompasses both sides of the apparent contradiction). As was discussed earlier, the self’s very discovery of its true self is dependent upon its relations with the others it comes in contact with. The salvation of the actualization and fulfillment of each person is inherently bound up with the loss or negation of the self (the letting go of the detached I). Buber says that I-It is necessary for survival, but that the person who only speaks I-It is not human. “To be sure, he views the beings around him as so many machines capable of different achievements that have to be calculated and used for the cause. But that is also how he views himself... He treats himself, too, as an It”.<sup>31</sup> This is the apparent paradox, that it is only in losing the self that one finds the true self, the self that Nishida calls a greater self that includes both God and others.

A tranquil, uneventful world with no sin and no dissatisfaction would be extremely mundane and shallow. Those who do not know sin cannot truly know the love of God, and those who have no dissatisfaction or anguish cannot comprehend the depths of spirituality. Such things as sin and anguish do not make the world incomplete; on the contrary they make it rich and profound.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Acts 17:27 NRSV.

<sup>31</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 118.

<sup>32</sup> Nishida, *An Inquiry into The Good*, 172.

Nishida says that, “An individual is an individual only in its relativity to other individuals”.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps this is the story of the apparent paradox, that love and strife really are both necessary to each other’s existence.

Despite this discussion and perhaps as a result of it, the question of the problem of evil, or the problem of suffering, is not one that can be played out on the pages of a philosophy paper once and then concluded. Rather it must be confronted and answered by everyone as often as we are confronted with suffering in our lives, for it is at these times that each of us decides whether to unite with God and others or to dwell in the anguish of the solitary soul.

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<sup>33</sup> Nishida, Last Writings, 92.