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Ordinatio Boni
A Rearticulation of Privation Theory

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Abstract: If God is the origin of all being, but is not the origin of evil, it must follow that evil is not a being. That is, evil has no positive existence. As such, evil is always a parasitic absence of the good; its sting lies in the deprivation of some good that ought to be (Anglin & Goetz, 1982). But this account faces serious challenges. Can the description of evil as a lack of good—even of a good that ought to be—adequately account for the human experience of evil? Heidegger seems to critique *privatio boni* precisely on the grounds that the alleged "lack" of evil can color one's whole existence—e.g., like a bout with cancer or disease (Capobianco, 1991). How can *privatio boni* be defended in a world haunted by the Holocaust? In my estimation, privation theory will benefit from a rearticulation. In this article, I will attempt to reformulate *privatio boni* as *inordinatio boni*. I will argue that evil is best understood as a disordering of the good—an inorganic whole, as it were—and that this account enables the affirmation that God is not the cause of evil—for evil is always a parasitic fracturing of the order of the good. The paper will proceed as follows. First, I will briefly articulate the notion of *privatio boni*. Next, I will argue that the phenomena of natural evil and pain do not fit within a privation concept of evil. Third, I will define and defend the notion of *inordinatio boni* within the resources of Christian theology, showing how it can metaphysically account for evils such as cancer alongside moral evils such as maliciousness. Finally, I will respond to several potential objections.

Keywords: Inordinatio Boni, Privatio Boni, Problem of Evil, Natural Evil, Pain

"Evil is the absence of good." This notion, known as *privatio boni*, functions as a metaphysical thesis on the nature of evil. Evil, it is said, is an *absence* of the good. Or, more accurately, it is a *deprivation* of some good that ought to be (McCabe et al., 2010). Such a claim is often motivated by the desire to hold together three propositions:

1.) God is the origin of all being
2.) God is not the origin of evil
3.) Evil exists.

If God is the origin of all being, but is not the origin of evil, it must follow that evil is *not a being*. That is, evil has no positive existence. As such, evil is always a parasitic absence of the good; its sting lies in the deprivation of some good that ought to be (Anglin & Goetz, 1982). But this account faces serious challenges. Can the description of evil as a lack of good—even of a good that ought to be—adequately account for the human experience of evil? Heidegger seems to critique *privation boni* precisely on the grounds that the alleged "lack" of evil can color one's whole existence—e.g. like a bout with cancer or disease (Capobianco, 1991). How can *privatio boni* be defended in a world haunted by the Holocaust?

In my estimation, privation theory will benefit from a rearticulation. In this article, I will attempt to reformulate *privation boni* as *inordinatio boni*. I will argue that evil is best understood as a *disordering* of the good—an *inorganic* whole, as it were—and that this account enables the affirmation that God is not the cause of evil—for evil is always a parasitic fracturing of the order of the good. The paper will proceed as follows. First, I will briefly articulate the notion of *privatio boni*. Next, I will argue that the phenomena of natural evil and pain do not fit within a privation concept of evil. Third, I will define and defend the notion of *inordinatio boni* within the resources of Christian theology, showing how it can metaphysically account for evils such as cancer alongside moral evils such as maliciousness. Finally, I will respond to several potential objections.

1. Privatio Boni

In order to clarify *privatio boni*, it will be useful to examine the concept's function in the moral and natural domains distinctively. This distinction will enable us to see how this account might be robustly employed to address the various sorts of evils we find in our world.

1.1. Privatio Boni in the Moral Domain

In a fascinating passage from Aquinas's *De Malo*, Aquinas argues that the evil of sin *does not* consist only in privation or absence, but also in the positive act of a given sin. It is the conjunction of privation plus act in which sin comes to be (Reichberg, 2002). This is because sin consists in an *assent* of the will to concupiscence that lacks due measure, order, and form (Thomas et al., 2001). Consider the act of murder. Murder, on this account, is wrong because it exemplifies a consent in the will which exemplifies a departure from the moral law. In this sense, the will to murder lacks due order, measure, and form. One can say that murder is worse than neglect by arguing that the former exemplifies a greater departure from moral justice than the latter, according to the differing rules from which both acts depart (Grant, 2015).

There are two ways to construe this "departure." On the one hand, some *privatio boni* theorists maintain that the privation just *is* a departure from the moral law. Thus, the "lack" consists in a lack of conformity to the moral order (Lee, 2007). Others construe this privation as an orientation towards some good over other goods. Thus, Oderberg argues that moral evil consists in willing some good upon which evil supervenes—namely, as a privation of order in which one prefers some good to the detriment of another. Thus, even a psychopathic murderer might prefer the good of pleasure over the good of another person's life (Oderberg, 2015). In construing the precise nature of the privation, we might appeal to the Augustinian notion of *ordo amoris*. For Augustine, rightly ordered loves constitute the foundation for living ethically. That is, one loves God and all things for God's sake—as reflections of God's beauty in varying degrees (Smith, 2016). In this sense, murder-for-pleasure is an embodiment of a privation of the order of loves; one loves pleasure *more* than they love their neighbor. Or alternative, their love for pleasure *lacks* due modulation by love for humanity, love for life, etcetera. Murder is also evil to the extent that it deprives someone of some good due to them. Thus, murder deprives someone of the good of life, and the extent of that inflicted deprivation corresponds to the extent to which an act is evil.

Some have raised several objections against this concept of moral evil. First, it is claimed that *privatio boni* cannot account for evil's causal efficacy, for "absences", by virtue of lacking being, have no causal powers (Robson, 2013). However, one might reply that this objection fails to account for the *conjunctive* element present in privation theory: the privation mars an actual *act*. It is the conjunction of action together with its privation that yields a deformed effect (Davies, 2013). Thus, privation theory states that any given moral evil is a positive act that is in some

way *deformed* by lacking something it ought to have. To my lights, *inordinatio boni* and *privatio boni* fair roughly equivalently in accounting for moral evil; my objections to privation theory do not lie here.

1.2. Privatio Boni in the Natural Domain

So much for *privation boni* in the moral domain. What of its employment to understand natural evils? Aquinas is representative of this tradition, arguing that the deprivation of the "good" of a particular entity is a natural evil. Thus, a fire consuming air constitutes "evil" for the air (by consuming it and destroying its integrity) but a good for the fire, insofar as the fire is actualized as the kind of thing it is. (*ST I.Q48.A2*) In this sense, then, the consumption of a fruit would constitute a natural evil for the fruit—insofar as the fruit's internal integrity is destroyed by chomping down on it—but a good for the consumer of the fruit (Siniscalchi, 2015). Cancer is understood to be an evil precisely because it causes privation in the bodily integrity of its subject.

Certain moral evils are embodied in natural evils. Thus, in the act of murder, not only is the act itself a deformed act morally speaking, but an evil is inflicted on the murdered insofar as she is deprived of due life. In the act of thievery, the victim is deprived of possessions she ought to have. Nevertheless, it isn't the case that every moral evil is embodied in a natural evil necessarily, for a murderer might fail to murder his target. Rather, these two types of evils can be considered distinctively in their respective domains. The common feature of such evils, for the privationist, is the aspect of lacking something that ought to be (whether rectitude, being, or due order).

2. Privation Theory, Natural Evil, and Pain

In my estimation, the most powerful objections to the privation theory of evil come from considering pain and natural evil. We will start with the former.

Kane puts the issue quite well:

> pain seems clearly to be more than merely the absence of its contrary opposite. There is a marked difference between a limb which merely lacks feeling—is numb or paralyzed or anesthetized—and one that is racked with pain. In the former case it is quite plausible to say that is merely a privation of something, namely normal feeling, that under usual circumstances would belong to the limb. But it is clearly inadequate to describe a limb aching with pain as suffering merely a privation of

> good health or normal feeling. When pain occurs in the body, there is something new and different in a person's experience which is not present when the body has simply lost feeling. (Kane, 1980)

There are, however, privation theories of pain. In order to show the need for my theory below, it will be necessary to address these. I will address three broad families of views synthesizing views presented in Swenson (2009).

Some argue that pains *are* privations of some good, and thus are bad in virtue of being a privation of something that ought to be. But this is clearly a mischaracterization of pain. Pain is *caused* by the absence of health, but is not *itself* an absence (Calder, 2007). There are positive features of pain which we experience as something more than a lack. Others, recognizing they must account for this phenomenological force, argue that pain is not itself evil, but there is an evaluative-affective component present *in* pain that is best accounted for in privative terms (Samet, 2012). Painfulness—the affective evaluation—is, so it is claimed, what is bad about pain. But this response seems weak to me for a central reason: it doesn't resonate with the phenomenological reality of pain. It simply isn't true that the pain *itself* doesn't present itself as an evil. If a person chops off my arm, and I feel pain, the pain itself is a result of the *right* operation and function of my body, even if it *indicates* something amiss. A doctor would be concerned about a patient who lost their arm and didn't feel any pain. And yet, doctors rightly give anesthetics to surgery patients in order to dull a natural function of the body, since there are times where the *pain itself* is what's undesirable. Our active attempts to dull physical pain itself seems to show that we experience pain—not merely some affective-evaluative element of pain—as an evil, in certain cases. Swenson (2009) articulates a case in which one might claim that a pain is a privation of x and is bad in virtue of a privation y it accompanies, but x and y needn't be the same privation. That which makes the privation of x bad is the y it accompanies or is linked to. Yet, as he says, such a theorist would have to discount our actual experience of pain, and this seems to a high a cost to my mind.

Privation theory also commits one to implausible views on natural evils. Natural evils are phenomena which seem to merit a negative evaluative judgment (e.g. we wish they weren't a part of our world), and yet are not morally evaluable. For instance, a lion might rip a sheep to shreds and brutally devour it alive. A bear might tear apart a fish into bits. A forest fire lights up trees and consumes countless animals—and so on (Feinberg 2004, 191–195). What is the privation theorist's explanation for why natural evils are *evil* as such? It is because there is "the absence of a good that is supposed to be present" (Alexander 2014, 96). Thus,

if a man has no wings, that is not evil for a man even if it is *evil for a bird* (SCG. III.6.1).

But there are two obstacles and one major objection the privation theory of natural evil runs into. First, the mere-difference view of disability is not compatible with privation theory. Many medical ethicists take issue with the claim that all disabilities are defects. For instance, certain mental health conditions may be simply classified as neurodivergences (Colgrove, 2020). Disabilities are relational terms (for instance, humans have a disability to fly), and some argue that they don't necessarily entail something evil (McFarland, 2018). One might reply, "well, we might distinguish between disabilities and impairments to identify the sorts of disabilities that are evil." But of course, many ethicists likewise reject the claim that all impairments are defects. Yet suppose one simply rejects the mere difference view of disability; this is surely an option. Nevertheless, there is yet another oddity the theory encounters. For instance, Aquinas believes that evil *befalls* air when fire consumes it (ST. I.q49.a1). Importantly, this evil is not caused as an intrinsic feature of the good thing (e.g. fire), but *per accidents*. Yet, this strikes me as a category error. When air is consumed by fire, I do not prefer to speak of "evil" has befalling the air—even though I know what Aquinas means by this (e.g. there is a privation that befalls air). Hence, if there is a metaphysical account of evil that more naturally preserves the way we think about creation's relatedness to itself, we should probably prefer it.

But there is a more substantive objection to the privation theory of natural evils. But worse still, such a view of natural evil inevitably entails God's causality of evil. For God created the world such that the *teloi* of certain things involve privation. Fire, for instance, naturally consumes oxygen and inflicts what Aquinas seems to call a "corruption" upon the air. One (like Aquinas) might try to appeal to the principle of double effect, such that God intended only the positive nature of the fire, with the privation of the air being only an effect. Indeed, McCabe argues that God is only the *per accidens* cause of evil, insofar as the deprivation of a natural good pertains to the accidents or effects of some substantial thing (e.g. fire) but not its essence (McCabe et al., 2010). But this seems dubious to me. God created the world *as an ordered whole*. Thus, his creation of fire's nature involved an accounting of its relation to other things within the ordered whole of the world. In any case, if God directly created, say, a "consumptive matter" that essentially deprived other substances, it isn't at all obvious that such a thing would be "naturally evil" by its essence. Now, one might reply that even if God created such "natural evils" or directly caused such "natural evils", this would not be a moral evil—and thus God would not be the author of evil in any problematic sense. While this response

might work, I worry that it unnecessarily muddies theological language concerning evil. If there is a way to speak of natural evils which identifies the contemporary problem of natural evil, then we would do well to update our grammar of natural evils.

3. *Indordinatio Boni*: Evil as Disordered Good

In order to give an account of *inordinatio boni*, it will help to start with a theological account of goodness. But to do this, we must first start with an account of God as The Good and created goodness's relation to God.

What does it mean to say "God is The Good"? To say God is "The Good" means that he is the source and origin of all that is good; there is no standard of goodness external to God's Being, to which God must give an account. God's Being *is* the content of goodness, and anything is good insofar as it participates in God's intrinsic goodness. Some have charged that defining God as Goodness itself makes "Goodness" contentless and unintelligible as a concept (Koons, 2012). But quite the opposite is true; since God's Being defines the nature of goodness itself, "goodness" is just as plentiful as God is. Nor is "goodness" unintelligible. Rather, the claim that God is The Good means that all finite goods, whether we know it or not, are good in virtue of their relation to the Infinite Good (Adams, 2002). It is not an epistemic claim, but a metaphysical one; one might know they're seeing light in a dungeon before knowing that such light comes from the sun.

But how exactly does created goodness participate in God's goodness? Simply articulating a "resemblance" between finite goods and Infinite Goodness doesn't tell us much (Decosimo, 2012). It will be useful, then, to go beyond Robert Adams by going back to an older theologian: Jonathan Edwards. For Edwards, created goodness is good as a *communication of* the excellencies of God. The excellency of creatures is "nothing but the emanation and expression of God's glory. God, in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself, and in seeking himself—himself diffused and expressed—he seeks their glory and happiness" (Edwards, 1998). Created goodness is a great circle, in which the "beams of glory come from God, are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original, so that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God; and he is their beginning, and the middle, and the end" (Edwards, 1998). Creation itself, then, is a refraction of the divine excellencies in a created modality. We can think of creation, then, as subsisting in an inter-relation of signs which sacramentally represent God's own goodness (Boersma, 2011).

What, then, is the good of a creature? Aquinas rightly argued that the goodness of a creature is its final cause—that which it "desires" as its perfective end (*ST I.Q5.A4*). Thus, a good hammer is one that functions in accordance with its end as a hammer. It is no fault of the hammer that it cannot be shot like an arrow. A good fruit is one that achieves its full actuality as a fruit. But the final actuality of each thing—a flower in full bloom, a lion from a cub—as well as the being of each thing on the way (a child, a seed, etcetera) is *the refraction of God's goodness in a created modality*. The whole symphony of creation, both individually (per essence) and collectively (per the relatedness of essences) reflects God's own goodness. In this way, all of creation is an organic whole (see Moore, 2004), in which the relatedness of all parts functions as an organic, ordered unity which sings the praises of God (with each part, in its created integrity, also displaying God's goodness in a material modality).

Ordered goodness, at first glance, might seem like an obscure concept. Thus, some unpacking is necessary. To say that one good is ordered to another is to describe a kind of *tendency*—directionality. Thus, a seed's parts are *ordered towards* its becoming a full blooming plant. This is, of course, a way of describing *teleology*. For Aristotle, that a heart regularly pumps blood shows that it is ordered towards—or *for*—pumping blood (Steffaniak, 2022). "Ordering" might happen in several ways. First, there is the ordering of ends. Jonathan Edwards famously distinguished between subordinate ends, ultimate ends, and chief ends. Subordinate ends are those things done for the sake of another thing. Thus, I might brush my teeth *so that* my teeth remain healthy. Ultimate ends are sought for their own sake. They are those ends for which subordinate ends are accomplished. Thus, I might buy flowers (subordinate end) to make my wife happy (ultimate end) because my wife's happiness is valued for its own sake. In this sense, a subordinate end is *ordered towards* an ultimate end. Chief ends are sorts of ultimate ends that permeate those ends; they are multiply accomplished by ultimate ends. For instance, one might have an ultimate mission in life to "be kind". They might therefore hold the door for other people, give money to the poor, etcetera—all of which are ways that the chief end is instantiated. Ultimate ends are instances in which a chief end is executed.

But this isn't the only way something might be ordered towards another thing. For instance, consider an automobile. In the construction of a car, its not the case that x is built on the way to y on the way to z on the way to a car. Rather, the parts of a car are correlated together towards accomplishing a particular function. In this sense, the parts of the car are ordered by its function—not as an ultimate end brought about by subordinate ends, but as a purpose instantiated in the joint

functioning of parts. Put differently, a major chord orders the individual notes to be played, not as an ultimate end sequentially accomplished by subordinate ends, but as a joint relation that organizes the playing of its constituent parts. In the moral domain, we might consider any given act of love. Suppose a man slow-dances with his wife on their 70th anniversary. Its not the case (at least necessarily) that each step is moving towards some pinnacle moment in which "love" is finally accomplished, but that their love for one another organizes the form of the dance and the steps taken therein. That which parts are ordered towards, in this sense, is that which those parts are ordered *by*. The constitution of a car, the steps of a dance, the individual actions that go into an act of hospitality—these parts are ordered *by* their telos as an overarching organizational form.

Furthermore, "ordering" involves a particular kind of "pressure" placed on the things-being-ordered. Consider, once again, the *ordo amoris*. On such an account, "rightly ordered loves" involves a kind of right relation of one's loves. Thus, if my love for money is *ordered by* my love for people, I will love money just insofar as it enables love for people; the former becomes colored, as it were, by the latter. Alongside this sort of order-pressure, there is a kind of *mutuality* involved in certain types of ordering. Justice, for instance, ordered by compassion, will arguably seek to impose a lesser sentence on a criminal then justice alone. Compassion ordered by justice, in turn, will not neglect the wrong-doing of a criminal on account of compassion. At the conceptual core of all kinds of "ordering" is a notion of *right-relatedness*.

God's good ordering of creation includes *all* of the above senses of ordering. Things are constructed as subordinate ends towards ultimate ends, as well as ultimate ends in themselves; as stated above, the whole of creation, considered in its inter-relatedness, is designed to reveal God's own goodness. Now, it might be objected that this construal of reality leaves no room for the *intrinsic* goodness of creatures. For if creatures are good only insofar as they reflect God's goodness, then they have no goodness of their own. But this sort of objection can be answered by recognizing that creaturely goodness is a *copy* of divine goodness; in other words, God portrays the goodness of the divine being in created goodness (Kemp, 2022). Per Edwards, created being is, *in its being*, a communication of divine excellencies. Thus, its intrinsic being just *is* divine self-communication in a created modality. Its goodness is thus as internal to it as its being. Something is therefore good just insofar as it displays or pictures the goodness of God's divine being in a creaturely modality—insofar as it *transposes*, as it were, the excellencies of God into a spatio-temporal mode (Lewis 2001, 91–115).

If the goodness of creation consists in a particular kind of *order* God has wrought in the creation of the world, then evil—if it is a parasitic non-being—can be rightly conceived of as *corruptive*. In other words, evil twists the good things God has made, *disordering* them. Sin and evil describe realities that are "not as they're supposed to be"—things that are out of joint, as it were (Plantinga, 1995). How does this conception account for natural evil, moral evil, and pain?

3.1. Natural Evil

In the light (or darkness) of *inordinatio boni*, natural evil turns out to describe a *twisting* of created things to non-divinely-intended natural ends. That is, God created the world as an inter-connected sign-system, in which the goodness of created things reflects and communicates the divine goodness in their essences and their *relations*. Wrong-relatedness, then, is at the core of evil. Understood this way, cancer in humans is a breakdown of the order of a cell. In cancer, a cell reproduces without ordered-ness towards the maintenance of the biological ecosystem of which it is a part; it happens when a cell, contrary to its normal operations, reproduces without proper checks and with corrupted code (Hausman, 2019). Viral infections—insofar as viral infections violate the *teloi* of created things—are natural evils *when* they break the order of God's good world. Natural disasters can be understood as evil when they similarly manifest disorder—that is, when they result in death, disruption, and suffering. For there is nothing *intrinsically* evil about an earthquake or a tornado; the evil of such things lies in their causing suffering.

Now, one might object: but this model risks proclaiming disorders or "break-downs" where there are no break-downs. For instance, many with disabilities do not see their disabilities as "disordered", but simply different—presenting a challenge to privation theories of evil (Colgrove, 2020). But on the view sketched above, one need not, for instance, declare all disabilities "disordered" (though this isn't ruled out either). Theologically speaking, if the world is truly marred by the Fall—as Romans 8:18-39 seems to teach—then we would do well to read the world with the "spectacles of Scripture." Thus, discerning what counts as genuine disorder involves heeding God's purposes as God himself has disclosed them, reading the world through the spectacles of Scripture (Calvin, 1960, I.V.12).

3.2. Moral Evil

What of moral evil? On this account, moral evil comprises two aspects: a

disordering of the internal order of loves and an infliction of disorder upon creation. As argued above, the classic privation account, I believe, can account for *most* cases of moral wrongdoing at the internal level of affections. Thus, one might love money above their family because their love for money *lacks* modulation (and thus is not ordered by) love for people and kin. But what exactly do we do with the case of Augustine and the pear? Augustine gives the *ratio* for his theft as follows:

> so that I might be wicked for its own sake (gratis) and there would be no cause of my wickedness other than wickedness. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved perishing, I loved my fall—not that for which I was falling—rather I loved my fall itself. (Augustine of Hippo, 2008, 2.11)

If sin is disordered good at the level of affections, how do we explain Augustine's love of the foulness of the act itself? In other words, if sin reflects a disorder in which one loves a good more (or less) than another good—a good in wrong relation to other goods—how do we account for love of foulness itself? Augustine himself seems to resolve this tension by noting that he wouldn't have committed the crime without the good of comradery with his fellow thieves and arguing that the good he loved was a kind of imitation of God's omnipotence—the ability to set limits ascribed to himself rather than to God (MacDonald, n.d.). This way of understanding the situation is plausible enough. But it's plausibility can be shown, I suggest, on grounds slightly differing from privation theory. If evil is *disordered goodness*, then it's metaphysical status can be better compared to a disharmony or misarranged puzzle than privation as such. Thus, when Augustine (or someone like him) chooses to do evil for evil's sake, he's selecting a *disordered good*. That is, he is selected the taking-of-a-pear out of due order relative to permission-from-the-owner; the discernment of this evil by the will is a discernment of a wrong relation in the moral order. In this sense, *inordinatio boni* amounts to a further specification of what makes a given privation evil—namely, that it is disordered.

But there is yet a puzzle to be solved. How is it that Augustine could take *delight* in wrong-doing for wrong-doing's sake? Augustine chalks this up to a delight in a particular good (the capacity to set ultimate limits) attributed to himself rather than to God. This account is surely plausible. But it is important, then, to refine Augustine's explanation at this juncture. *Why* is Augustine's delight wrong? "Because it is mis-attributed", one might say. Augustine is usurping God in his action, doing what is right in his own eyes. He therefore loves limit-setting more than he loves God himself—or something like that. Thus, defenders of privation theory argue that Augustine's loves suffer evil because of a particular *lack*—the

lack of love for God regulating Augustine's love for limit-setting or autonomy. But *inordinatio boni* reverses the structure of explanation. That is, it is not the case that disorder is evil because it is privative; rather, privation is evil *because it is disordered*. In this way, Augustine's love for self-assertion *does* lack a love for God, but the "lack" here identifies a fundamental disorder; Augustine's love for self-assertion is not *ordered by* a love for God.

3.3. Pain

As noted above, the thorniest issue for the privation theory is the problem of pain. How does *inordinatio boni* schematize pain? It will not do to argue that pain is a good itself as a normal and healthy part of bodily functioning. As argued above, painkillers and anesthesia use show that phenomenologically, we still experience at least *some* pains—even when those pains are normal—as evil.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that we don't experience *all* pains as evil. In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis notes that there are sorts of "pains" (proto-pains, we shall say) which we enjoy. Thus, the faint ache of the muscles we experience during a hike, or the physical stress of a workout, or the thrilled ache of dancing—all of these can actually be *enjoyed* (Lewis, 2001). Now, it is true that we do not enjoy these proto-pains for their own sake. One might enjoy a walk in the cold to experience the pleasure of being warmed by a fire. But we may still conceive of them as non-evils *on the way* to some good. In this way, the sequence in which we experience proto-pain-and-relief may be a kind of organic whole—a pleasure constituted by the experience of proto-pain and its subsequent relief. Proto-pains become evils we dislike when they are raised above a certain threshold.

This is an important clue to the nature of pain. Pain both instructs us, via the body itself, about the natural order of creation (e.g. that we weren't meant to touch fire, or hike beyond a certain limit of time, say) and itself can constitute particular joys. Pain, experienced within the bounds of God's good order (e.g. prior to its ceasing as proto-pain), is both instructive and even contributive to happiness. Whence the evil of pain, then? I suggest that pain—the kind we dislike—is the *phenomenological experience of disorder*. It is "what it is like to be" in the thick of a disordered state of affairs. And unsurprisingly, it results from natural disorder.

Thus, the stimuli in our body that give rise to pain are *over-stimulated*, metaphysically speaking, when they exist in situations of disorder. The faint ache in our legs becomes painful when we must, for some reason or another, walk too long. The joy of a workout is corrupted when we work too hard, or are out-of-shape, or are injured. The sensation of a hot-tub becomes unpleasant when the

order of temperature in the water becomes unfitting to the natural ordered constitution of our bodies—and so forth. If evil pain is the phenomenological experience of disorder, then it is no wonder we would want it to stop! Importantly, this does not turn evil into its own substance, since the experience of evil pain is the experience of a disordering of a good—it is the over-stimulation of a good and happiness-contributing element of our bodily constitution. Thus, *inordinatio boni* can account for the experience of pain without violating the Christian metaphysical conviction of Good's primacy and evil's non-substantiveness.

4. Answering Objections

Let's take stock. On my account, evil is the disordering of the good. It is an event that happens *within* the ordered goods of the world, disrupting that order and therein twisting goodness. But it is not an independent being of its own. Just as the disorder of a symphony has no being independent of a symphony, evil has no being independent of goodness; evil is *wrong-relatedness* between the goods of the world. How might one object to this theory? As far as I can tell, there are three main objections to *inordinatio boni*. First, one might argue that the theory is not radically different from *privatio boni*. Second, one might say that "disorder" has no more causal power than a "privation", and thus the theory has no advantage on this score. Finally, one might argue that *inordinatio boni* suffers from the symmetry problem as well: can't goodness equally be described as "disordered badness"?

First, it has not been my intention to construct a radically different theory of evil. Indeed, I think the impulse behind privation theory is correct: evil has no being of its own and is only parasitic on goodness. I only intend to *refine* and *rearticulate* privation theory over and against objections. That said, *inordinatio boni* differs from privation theory at one key point, already mentioned above. Rather than framing disorder's evil as a privation, *inordinatio boni* reverses the explanatory structure: privation is evil as a disordering of the good. This reversal allows us to account for natural privations which are not evils—e.g. grass does not undergo an "evil" when a gazelle eats it. Indeed, certain kinds of death may (or may not) be part of God's good order, opening the door for a scientific account of animal development. Further still, it enables us to explain why pain, although difficult to account for as in evil in merely privative terms, is nevertheless evil—but is yet not its own substance. Pain is the experience of disorder, and thus it is "what it is like" to be in the thick of disorder. It results from a disordered stimulation of the relevant biological substrates producing pain.

Second, one might argue that "disorder" has no more causal power than "privation", and so has no explanatory advantage relative to causality. However, this neglects the role of *weakly emergent* properties. Thus, water (H_20) displays properties that emerge out of the interaction of two hydrogen molecules and an oxygen molecule. Water displays cohesion, the ability to quell fire, etcetera.(Marrin, 2020) The interaction of these molecules displays features that are true in light of their interaction. In this sense, the causal efficacy of evil can be accounted for as an *inorganic whole*—emergent out of the interaction of disordered goods. Disharmony, for instance, has efficacy as disharmony precisely through the disordered interaction of particular notes; why can't the same be true of evil? By employing (weak) emergence, we are able to account for the aesthetic and causal dimensions of evil that don't seem intuitively described as "privations". For instance, the grating-ness of a disharmony is emergent upon the interaction of notes in their disordered relation; the ugliness of ingratitude, then, stems from its manifest unfit with, and therefore disordered relation in, the order of reality.

Finally, one might argue that *inordinatio boni* suffers a similar symmetry problem to *privatio boni*. Privation theory has been critiqued for a failure to justify its assumptions. That is, if one says that "evil is the absence of good", couldn't one alternatively argue that "goodness is the absence of evil"—aren't both at least equally explanatorily justified by moral experience (Calder, 2007)? On the contrary, privation theory rightly accounts for a feature of moral experience that points to, at minimum, a metaphysical dependence of evil on goodness. For instance, suppose you're trying to explain to someone why lying is wrong. You say "lying is wrong because you're supposed to tell the truth—telling the truth loves people!" Such an explanation seems fairly intelligible. On the other hand, suppose you tell someone "supporting people's lives is right because it would be wrong to murder them!" Such an explanation doesn't seem intelligible at all. In other words, there is a conceptual dependence of evil on goodness as the failure of the good—the failure of moral obligated-ness.

This dependence seems to predominate our notions of good and bad, right and wrong. For instance, if someone were to ask "what makes this car bad", you might appeal to features in light of which the car fails to function—features it ought to have. But if one were to ask "why is this car a good car", you wouldn't say "because it isn't broken" or "it isn't out of joint." This sort of answer is contentless. However, you would explain why a car is good in light of *features it actually has*. This reveals something key: good's content depends on positive features about reality, whereas evil is a parasitic notion upon goodness. I suggest that this dependency should be cashed out in terms of "order." And this reformulation

simply isn't vulnerable to symmetry objections. Evil, by its conceptual nature, refers to a state of affairs that's "not the way it's supposed to be." But to say that goodness is disordered evil would be to say that goodness is a disordering of the "way it's not supposed to be"—which gives no positive content to what goodness is. Thus, *inordinatio boni* supplies privation theory with the philosophical grammar to meet the symmetry objection.

Theologically, of course, there is abundant reason to adopt *inordinatio boni*. The Hebrew Scriptures seems to describe the goodness of creation in terms of *Shalom*—a state of affairs in which things rightly relate to each other for the mutual flourishing of created things (Woodley, 2012). Evil seems to consist in the disruption of *shalom*. If God has created an ordered universe, this only makes sense; evil, as an non-substantive intruder, can be nothing other than a twisting of the order God has established. Evil is a corrupt twisting of God's good things—disharmony disrupting the original harmony of creation. In the eschaton, God will redeem creation, not merely by filling up what is lacking in his good order, but by singing a new song—resolving the disharmony of evil into the harmony of the new creation.

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