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FROM THEODICY TO ANTHROPODICY

A Reflection on Chapter 3,
“Divine Action and the Argument from Neglect”

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Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp (hereafter CK) are theologians who welcome the advances of modern science, while critical of the fundamentalist rejection of science. Clayton is an advocate of the “non-interventionist, objective, divine action” (NIODA) program. CK propose a well-considered theodicy that is measurably superior to most theodicies in its seriousness and candor. I critically reflect on their program, noting that our agreement on ethical goals makes our dialogue a constructive engagement.

**Theodicy-making and the Classical
Problem of Suffering and Evil**

“Theodicy” was coined by the moderate Enlightenment¹ multi-talented² Gottfried Leibniz in 1710³ by combining two Greek words: θεός, god or deity, and δίκη, translated in recent centuries as “justice.”⁴ Leibniz's *Théodicée* was partly responding to the characterization of the problem as rationally insoluble in the *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697, 1702) by Huguenot and Radical Enlightenment scholar Pierre Bayle. Like John Milton in *Paradise Lost* (1667; Book I), Leibniz sought “to justify the ways of God to men.” His solution appealed to the presumed goodness of

¹ The main strands of thought in conflict during the Enlightenment era were radical, moderate-conservative, and counter-Enlightenment, as described by Jonathan Israel in his massive multi-volume histories: *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and *Revolutionary Ideas: An intellectual history of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press; 2014).

² Among Leibniz' many accomplishments was the independent co-discovery of the calculus with Sir Isaac Newton.

³ Originally published in 1710, the French version of the theodicy of Gottfried Leibniz was *Essais de Théodicée sur la Bonté de Dieu, la Liberté de l'Homme et l'Origine du Mal* (Amsterdam: Changuion, 1734), which in English is *Essays of Theodicy on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*. See Austin Farrer, *Introduction to the Theodicy* (La Salle: Open Court, 1985). The work is also called *Théodicée* for short.

⁴ See <http://www.philosophy-index.com/terms/dike.php>, and the “theodicy” entry in Wikipedia.

God, a divine “pre-established harmony,” human freedom, and the balance of good to evil in the world. In *Candide, ou L’Optimisme* (1759), Voltaire satirized Leibniz and his theodicy in the character Dr. Pangloss who stubbornly holds “that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.”

Attempts to resolve the theistic problem of suffering and evil have a long history in Western classical, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought, as well as in other traditions. Today, in the Leibnizian tradition, a theodicy is an active defense of God’s allowance of evil in light of the classical divine characteristics of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. Most modern theodicies propose solutions modifying the first two in order to save the third, omnibenevolence. CK’s *apologia* is firmly in this category.

A trenchant statement of the problem of evil is the famous *Tetralemma* of Epicurus (341-270 BCE):

- α – *Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.*
- β – *Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent.*
- γ – *Is God both able and willing? Then how come evil?*
- δ – *Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?*

Theodicy also entails (1) the divine revelation problem and (2) the Darwinian problem. (1) Why is there divinely endorsed evil in the “revealed” scriptures, whether the Hebrew Torah and prophets, the Christian New Testament, or the Quran? One cannot ignore the multilayered textual claims (important to conservatives in these traditions) for divine agency in authorizing, participating, and justifying of heinous evil, including wars of conquest and plunder, genocides, and other moral atrocities such as slavery and misogyny. All of these are approvingly or grudgingly attributed to God and his partisans.⁵

(2) The Darwinian problem:⁶ Why do sentient beings suffer and go extinct so prodigiously throughout the long, wandering, emergent experimenting in the evolution of life and its diversity? Why is evolution so marked with numerous dead-end extinctions, including so many extinct human species and groups of the genus *Homo*? Why should the most creative, novelty-producing episodes of evolution depend so particularly on mass extinctions? Furthermore, why are the adapted reproductive processes so profligate, wasteful, and wantonly spendthrift of lives and potential lives? In the final soliloquy in Camus’ *L’Étranger*,⁷ the condemned Meursault tells

⁵ See Thom Stark’s *The Human Faces of God: What Scripture Reveals When It Gets God Wrong (And Why Inerrancy Tries to Hide It)*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011). The Christian New Testament is not exempt because of predestination and hell. Particularly the Pauline and Johannine writings have a recurring appeal to predestination and damnation, although ameliorated in part over the centuries by Pelagian, semi-Pelagian, Arminian, and universalist currents in Christianity. Furthermore, there are a growing number of conservative Christian thinkers who are abandoning the old notion of an eternal hell of torment: Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, third edition, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011); *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* eds. Christopher I. Date, Gregory M. Stump, Joshua W. Anderson (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014).

⁶ John W. Loftus, “The Darwinian Problem of Evil” (chapter 9), *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2010).

⁷ Albert Camus, *L’Étranger* (1942); *The Stranger*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), Part II, ch. 5.

the priest, that there is “only one class of men, the privileged class”—those who are alive. As living humans we have already won the Mendelian lottery and run the Malthusian gauntlet—just to be born, only to face the Darwinian sieve for the next generation. And once we arrive, the joys, the good fortune, as well as the sufferings and untimely deaths are distributed so unevenly.

That the Hebrew and Christian scriptures (both anthologies with long textual histories and oral prehistories) do not provide a coherent solution to the problem of suffering has been known for a long time. Bart Ehrman has convincingly so argued yet again.⁸ The most penetrating parts of the Hebrew scriptures, however, do not lightly dismiss the problem. A few passages especially from *Ecclesiastes* and the poetic mid-section of *Job* starkly and poignantly enunciate the struggle to understand.

The Argument from Neglect

From the broad sweep available, CK choose a limited statement of the problem of evil to which they respond. They cite the statement of the problem by philosophical theologian, Wesley Wildman, who argues that the existence of suffering indicates a divine neglect, and that this makes the idea of a personal deity untenable because it does not “pass the test of parental moral responsibility.”⁹

Wildman’s objection is itself a narrowing of the problem, because it only considers divine neglect, bypassing scriptural evil by abandoning the traditional personhood of God. CK do not address the Darwinian or biblical problems, despite striving to retain a proximally orthodox theology more or less referable to Scripture.

CK do well to largely ignore the traditional “free will” theodicy, which so enthralls many conservative theists. “Free will” has never been an adequate solution. In human morality, no one ever argues that stopping a criminal from harming others is a violation of “free will” whatever the nature of volition or biological agency. So why should a personal God get away with such a justification of neglect of evil, i.e., bystander guilt?¹⁰ Even limiting the problem to divine neglect leaves no small challenge for their divine-person *apologia*.

In defending person-language theism, CK set out to accomplish two tasks: (1) Postulate “that there may be a good reason why a personal and active God” (45) either cannot or chooses not to do what we as moral human beings would instinctively expect an omnibenevolent or any benevolent agent to do. (2) Avoid the *reductio ad absurdum* of constraining divine action to

⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2008).

⁹ Wesley J. Wildman, “A Review and Critique of the ‘Divine Action Project’: A Dialogue among Scientists and Theologians Sponsored by Pope John Paul II,” Unpublished manuscript (n.d.), 3. Cited in *Predicament*, chapter 3.

¹⁰ A concept more prominent since the Nazi Holocaust (millions of deaths, aside from war casualties, of Jews, Gypsies, gays, socialists, unionists, Slavs; including the Nazi-satellite Ustazi Croat genocide of Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies) while certain leaders of the Christian churches, of Allied governments, and of business and finance, mostly stood by and/or abetted either financially or otherwise. Similar complicities are found with the Tibetan, Cambodian, Indonesian, and Rwandan genocides, etc. Any theodicy must face the challenge of bystander guilt.

irrelevancy or pointlessness—omnipotence, omniscience *reductio*. They in part capitulate to Epicurus' *Tetralemma* by compromising omnipotence, and maybe omniscience. Have they also compromised omnibenevolence?

At the outset, CK set a minimal standard of argument. Rather than seeking compelling and persuasive reasons for divine neglect, they only seek a "*plausible* explanation for apparent divine neglect." (46). They proceed to minimize even further by asserting that their response need only be plausible "in the eyes of the relevant community of inquiry;" that is, to those "not already closed to the possibility" of person-language theism. As long as it is merely plausible and consistent, it will count as defeating Wildman's objection, they assert. Their minimization of the problem reduces the appeal to those outside their "community of inquiry," a community that seems to consist of those who begin from the same assumptions.

Our review will examine whether the CK theodicy convincingly passes not only Wildman's "parental responsibility" test, but more importantly whether it answers to the compelling broader challenge of theodicy. For only then can their considered efforts be of relevance to a wider informed audience.

CK's Hypothesis for Defeating the Argument from Divine Neglect

Marshaling concepts from science, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, and kenotic (self-emptying) christologies, CK seek to meet the challenge as they have posed it. Their hypothesis is that God's purposes include creating a universe capable of bringing about the evolution of "finite rational agents capable of entering into communion with God." (46). Their argument is rooted in the theodicy of Irenaeus (third century CE), that divine neglect is necessary for "soul-making" or creation of moral agents, a type of "moral choice" theodicy. Hence, the universe must have laws / causal regularities which God does not override, to avoid hindering rational agency in the creatures intended. Two questions they pose in this context are as follows (46). (1) How law-like do the laws of nature have to be? Why can't God keep the regularities of nature long enough to evolve rational and autonomous creatures, but occasionally suspend the laws to prevent innocent suffering? In short, is there a way to violate the laws of the universe after all, for the sake of theodicy? (2) If God cannot override nature's regularities, then how can God perform any intentional actions within the universe? To the point, in a causally-implicate universe, how can we ascribe active moral intention to God? Very central questions indeed.

(1) CK's first response to divine neglect and the "parental responsibility" test (47). God could not suspend the laws even occasionally because it would be hard to see how rational and moral agency could evolve in such a universe. The pursuit of systematic knowledge of the natural world would not be possible. Human rational agency can grow because we can grow in understanding of the universe through scientific observation of natural regularities, because those regularities do not alter arbitrarily, through either human or divine subjective fiat. This is

CK's regularity argument. So why can't the divine agent intervene at least *occasionally* to prevent or relieve human suffering, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami (Christmas, 2004) which claimed about 250,000 lives and untold suffering, or the Nazi Holocaust, or the shooting of the babies in Newtown Connecticut, or the millions of deaths every year from climate change, environmental degradation, contributing to child hunger, disease, etc.? Why tolerate this appalling level of suffering? CK respond that such violations of natural law would deprive the created finite agents of perceiving themselves as separate from God (49). CK offer a *not-even-once* (NEO) principle for divine intervention, because if God were to intervene at all, God would "incur ... the responsibility to intervene in every case" to prevent innocent suffering. The postulated deity only incurs a personal responsibility to intervene by intervening. It follows then, that if he never intervened (not-even-once!) *he would never incur any responsibility at all*. Next they reframe this "answer" by subdividing it into three answers:

- (a) *Forensic*—God could not explain or justify to others why he didn't intervene in other cases. This option CK feel is too anthropocentric. But isn't it already anthropocentric to conceptualize a personal deity with moral intentions to explain the world's unfairness?
- (b) *Unethical*—It would be unjust for God to intervene in only certain cases but not others, even with a "proportional intervention" to evil prevented or suffering alleviated. This response immediately concedes the central argument of fairness against theodicy itself. (i) Empirically the world is drastically unfair, even in an idyllic ecosystem or a happy family, let alone the world at large, from the poignantly happy to the desperately agonizing. (ii) Is the failure of a moral agent to intervene in all cases more moral than failure to intervene in some? This problem seems to be a byproduct of a personal-language theism.
- (c) *Metaphysical*—The universe would lose autonomy in a chain reaction if God disrupted natural law. It is not entirely clear whether this argument is primarily designed (i) to save natural law by arguing that causality would be lost by divine intervention, i.e., the "autonomy" of the universe, or more pointedly (ii) to save the "autonomy" of a personal God.

CK assert that "it is not obvious [to them at least] that the forensic, ethical, and metaphysical responses are fatally flawed; each one may offer some support for the 'not even once' principle." (50) So, they suggest that a combination of the ethical and metaphysical answers provide a more compelling response. On the contrary, every one of these flawed responses illustrates how the NEO principle rather than supporting instead undermines a theodicy project.

Then they also suggest that perhaps the universe has an *appearance* of regularity for all that science can observe, but that underneath that appearance God could be working miracles subtly and furtively to alleviate suffering (52). (a) Empirically the alleviation is ineffective because the suffering and unfairness are unalleviated. (b) Reducing the regularities of natural causality to an appearance is a surreptitious surrender of the NEO principle. (c) *Appearance* posits at least one *moral* contradiction—a divine deception, where a personal deity engages in the staging of false

appearances of causal regularity. Data show that regularities in nature are not mere apparent phenomena, but ineradicably intrinsic in deep mathematically described causal patterns, from quantum mechanics to the biosciences, which are increasingly becoming quantitatively strong-inference, at least in the hands of the best practitioners.

CK acknowledge that apparent regularity still leaves open the argument that God helps some but not others, and is therefore ethically inconsistent—this concedes that the problem of unfairness is as unresolved as ever. They freely admit that the first set of responses are not convincing because (a) evolution of rational, autonomous creatures requires a universe with (we must add, *actual*) laws¹¹ and regularity, and (b) while divine intervention may be metaphysically possible, ignoring the contradiction, by having God intervene even subtly to help some but not others is immorally inconsistent, unfair, i.e., God would “*incur ... the responsibility to intervene in all cases*” (52; emphasis added). Why God would only *incur* responsibility when he starts helping, and not by nature of his moral agency as a person, is left entirely unclear. We don't excuse capable humans in the immediate presence of suffering or need. Whether acting or refraining, God would have inescapable moral responsibility as a person, as a moral agent. CK seem not to recognize this.

With such internal logical and ethical contradictions, CK's first response to Wildman's test of “parental responsibility” fails to meet their own standard for consistency and therefore plausibility, the broader problem of suffering and evil is as untouched and unresolved as ever. They propose a second response.

(2) *CK's second response* (52). Granting that God cannot intervene in ways that disturb the natural regularity of the universe, CK introduce a new claim to save moral divine intervention in some form. CK assert that there *must be* one “sphere of existence within the created universe where events are not determined by the natural regularities” of natural causality, i.e., the sphere of the “mental” or “the mind.” Here they abandon the NEO principle, in the very place, the human brain, where NEO would be most needed to preserve freedom in an Irenaean world evolving moral agents. The question for theodicy is whether slipping in divine intervention actually helps solve the problem of divine neglect.

Violating the NEO Principle by Asserting “the Nonlawlike Nature of the Mental” (53)

The *ad hoc* rescue hypothesis is their appeal to the “emergent complexity” of the human brain. CK affirm that they are seeking a way to avoid dualism—the belief that humans have an “immaterial soul” which is a different substance with different rules from what constitutes the universe—energy and mass with attendant fields and states in space-time. Describing substance dualism,

¹¹ It is important to note that the application of the notion of “laws” in regard to the causal patterns of nature is always metaphorical.

while trying to avoid ontological monism, CK appeal to emergence, and then *de facto* treat the observed levels of emergent phenomena within the universe as separate causal substances (causal-persistent entities, ontologically self-contained with their own rules of causation, all for *gratis*), despite their claim to seek an emergent monist solution. In *Predicament*, their unspoken substance pluralism is comparable to the Leibnizian metaphysical pluralism. Contrary to all evidence, they seem to divorce the observed emergent phenomena from their particular causal embeddings in the universe. In so doing, CK ironically make the very mistaken category conflation that Leibniz himself warned against in his own explicit battle against ontological monism:

“It is well to beware, moreover, lest in confusing substances with accidents, in depriving created substances [Leibniz’ self-contradictory monadic pluralism] of action, one fall into Spinozism [ontological monism].... If the accidents [i.e., in our context, particular emergent phenomena] are not distinct from the substances; if it does not endure beyond a moment, and does not remain the same...any more than its accidents...: Why shall not one say, with Spinoza, that God is the only substance, and that creatures are only accidents or modifications?”¹²

Why not indeed? Precisely because of theology and theodicy, that conclusion (in modern terms, ontological monism) was the one that Leibniz then, and CK now, it seems must eschew at all costs.

Emergence is natural causality. Emergence is the “the arising of novel and coherent structures, patterns and properties during the process of self-organization in complex systems,” although “emergence functions not so much as an explanation but rather as a descriptive term pointing to the patterns, structures or properties that are exhibited on the macro-scale.”¹³ Emergent properties are well established in the sciences, requiring no appeal to substance dualism or pluralism and are being given more rigorous understandings of the newer sciences of complexity with their non-linear mathematics of chaos and systems theories.¹⁴ Emergence can be understood in terms of *synergy*, which is “the combined (cooperative) effects that are produced by two or more particles, elements, parts or organisms – effects that are not otherwise attainable.”¹⁵ When there is a hierarchy of levels in a complex system, we have “synergies of scale.” Properties occur at higher synergistic levels, which are not apparent at the more elemental component levels.

¹² Freiherr von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, ed. Austin Farrer, trans. E. M. Huggard (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 364: 393.

¹³ Peter A. Corning, “The Re-emergence of ‘Emergence’: A Venerable Concept in Search of a Theory,” *Complexity* 7, no. 6 (2006): 18–30.

¹⁴ Peter A. Corning (2012). “The Re-emergence of Emergence, and the Causal Role of Synergy in Emergent Evolution.” *Synthese* 185, no. 2 (2012): 295–317. See the broad range of work connected with the Institute for the Study of Complex Systems (www.complexsystems.org), the Sante Fe Institute (www.santafe.edu), and the multi-volume sets of studies of emergent and complex phenomena and the journal *Emergence: Complexity & Organization An International Transdisciplinary Journal of Complex Social Systems* published by Emergent Publications, and in other scientific journals. The term “emergence” is often used in the social sciences, whereas the physical, biological sciences and artificial intelligence communities often use the terms self-organization and self-organizing complex systems.

¹⁵ Corning, “The Re-emergence of ‘Emergence,’” (2002).

Precisely modeling mathematically the emergent-chaotic behavior at higher synergistic levels may become utterly non-trivial, but not non-causal. Emergent phenomena are multitudinous in nature and involve the creative emergence or self-organization of novelty and intricate complexity in systems. Causation goes both up and down the synergistic levels of scale in an intricate web or “hairball” of causation, as being shown in preliminary but promising modeling of self-organizing evolving system behaviors. This includes the downward causation of biological agents acting in goal-oriented or “teleodynamic” fashion to alter their environments or relationships, including human semiotic (meaning-making) activity, all of which is consistent, as Terence Deacon points out, with physical causality but not in an eliminative, reductionist way.¹⁶ *None of this data even weakly implies that these phenomena are causally-rooted outside of Nature* (substance dualism or pluralism), but on the contrary all of it strongly infers consistency with the inherent unity of the world.

CK then argue that in the higher levels of a complex system, such as “a person or society, the agents being studied have become so strongly individualized that it becomes questionable whether their actions can still be explained in terms of underlying laws.” By assuming this they advocate a philosophical “anomalous monism”¹⁷ or “not law-governed” monistic account of mind to *imply* that “mental events are not” governed by natural causation. In actuality, they go further and assert pluralistic ontological independence of agents (i.e., Leibnizian monadism). Whether citing a *faux* monism or appealing to pluralism or panentheistic dualism, CK’s attempt to divorce emergent levels from their causal embeddings is precisely where CK go beyond any warrant from science. Emergent levels are not separate ontological substances, but causally inseparable and enmeshed.

To accept *Predicament’s* suggested “‘anomalous’ account of mind one must maintain that, despite the dependence of the mental on the physical, human actions are not determined by the operation of natural laws or regularities” (55; see Appended Note). By assertion against all evidence, CK simply brush away the argument that *the complete dependence is indeed emergent, both causally dependent and computationally non-trivial*. CK concede that “patterns of human action may be lawlike, and rigorous forms of quantitative social science may well be possible” (55; emphasis theirs). Indeed, as attested in numerous peer-reviewed published papers, rigorous and quantitative scholarship in the social sciences, sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, and ethology is increasingly possible. CK simply assert that “[these patterns] will not be equivalent to,

¹⁶ “Teleodynamic” is the term used to describe biological teleological, purpose-driven, and goal-oriented behavior and mental phenomena by Terence Deacon, *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011) and other references cited by CK. It is interesting that CK cite Deacon, Paul Davies, and other emergentists in defense of their own substance pluralism or even panentheistic dualism—positions apparently quite distinct from those of these scientists—who do not share the theological concerns or metaphysics of CK.

¹⁷ “Anomalous monism” is a philosophical thesis about the mind-body relationship first proposed by Donald Davidson (1970) and developed since. Donald Davidson, “Mental Events” in *Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

and hence (in principle) reducible to, natural scientific laws” (55).¹⁸ That assertion is contrary to all of the evidence, in part because all of the upward and downward causation reveals the causal embedding of the emergent levels within each other.

Systems-emergent phenomena such as self-organizing complexity, biological agency (including human agency), and social interaction do not require such a divorce from natural causality, anymore than software-generated imagery, content, interacting networks such as the internet, and the emergent self-optimization of evolutionary algorithms (also known as artificial intelligence or machine learning) are separable from the physical electronics and semiconductor physics of the hardware. In neither case is there evidence for such separation or any need for substance pluralism/dualism, but a systems-emergence in a unitary world, where freedom is possible (Appended Note).

CK note that Davidson’s (now dated) “anomalous monism” proposition is physicalist, while asking, “But does monism *have* to be physicalist?” (55). They acknowledge further that models “in ecology or psychology are not unleashed from nature; they must remain consistent with physical laws” (55). Why must they remain so? *For the very obvious reason that these phenomena are according to all available evidence causally inseparable from and embedded in the physical world.* Asserting that “the leash turns out to be rather longer than one might have thought,” CK claim that “what we need is a version of anomalous monism that moves beyond the physicalist assumptions” (55) of Donaldson.

Why do we need this? Why this special pleading? A “beyond the physical” is certainly not what the scientific disciplines in question need in order to advance rapidly, as they indeed already are. However, a “beyond the physical” is *precisely what CK need for their theodicy. That is, CK apparently need something akin to substance pluralism, idealism, or dualism for their theodicy, just like Leibniz did.* Leibniz invented monadic substance pluralism for his theodicy in order to combat the naturalistic threat of Spinozistic substance monism during the early Enlightenment. As the brilliant Leibniz clearly saw and defensively conceded in response to one inquiry (1714), “On the contrary, it is precisely by means of the Monads [his infinite number of interacting

¹⁸ A common error in discussions about reductionism, determinism, and materialism (which CK seem to successfully avoid) is that science (knowledge) is often considered in terms of modern specialized disciplines, instead of the broadly “core epistemological categories” in their classic Stoic sense, where *physics* is the modeling of nature, *logic* is the modeling of reason (*logos*) and thinking in the context of nature, and *hermeneutics* is the modeling of thinking about thought. It is only in this broad classic sense that “the sciences are reducible to physics” and we include modern physics among the scientific disciplines “as a special case at their basic foundations” where mathematical modeling and empirical inference are most intimately linked. At the same instant, the “higher levels of complexity are *irreducible* to physics in the sense that by passing down the hierarchy, emergent properties are effectively being lost” in Ranier E. Zimmermann, “Loops and knots as *topoi* of substance: Spinoza revisited.” (arXiv:gr-qc/0004077v2, 2000). These non-contradictory points, which should be obvious, are missed because some idealist or dualist / pluralist polemic is muddled by a focus on a pre-quantum, pre-relativistic, Newtonian-Laplacian “mechanical materialism” (late eighteenth to nineteenth centuries) and/or the “dialectic materialism” rooted in Marx and Engels (late 19th century), and developed in ideological blasts from the former Soviet Union (twentieth century). In short, at least some modern idealist and dualist / pluralist polemicists are still fighting a kind of philosophical Cold War—which from the standpoint of science is over. Here I’m indebted in part to mathematician and philosopher R. E. Zimmerman in his 2000 paper, and in *New Ethics Proved in Geometrical Order: Spinozist Reflexions on Evolutionary Systems*, Exploring Unity through Diversity, Volume 2 (Litchfield Park: Emergent Publications, 2010), chapter 1.

eternal 'substances'] that Spinozism is destroyed.... For there are as many true substances...as there are monads; *whereas according to Spinoza, there is but one sole substance. He would be right if there were no Monads*" (emphasis added).¹⁹

Like Leibniz before, CK seem conflicted, both tempted and repelled, but nevertheless haunted by ontological monism. Johann Gottfried Herder observed: "What Leibniz was in his heart I may not know; but his *Theodicy*[,] just as many of his letters[,] show that, precisely in order not to be a Spinozist, he thought through his system."²⁰ In the German *Aufklärung* of the second half of the eighteenth century, the major figure Gotthold Lessing expressed his "fear" that Leibniz was a cryptic "Spinozist at heart." Even moderate Enlightenment luminary, David Hume, more radical in modernist admiration than in actuality, professed horror at that "hideous hypothesis, the doctrine of the simplicity of the universe, and the unity of that substance, in which [Spinoza] supposes both thought and matter to inhere."²¹ The extent to which the prominent figures of the moderate Enlightenment from Leibniz to Locke, Voltaire, and Kant, shrank from, flirted with, and obsessed over ontological monism (Spinozism) can be seen in their frightened reaction to the subversive theological, philosophical, social, and democratic implications of the Radical Enlightenment—a clandestine movement from the seventeenth century radicals around Spinoza, Bayle, van Leenhoff, and van Dale through English radicals such as Anthony Collins and John Toland, to the French materialists like Meslier to Diderot, D'Holbach, D'Alembert, and Condorcet in the late eighteenth century. This unprecedented upheaval in Western thought and culture²² still frames the intellectual culture wars today: Spinoza versus Leibniz.²³ The century and a half long struggle over ontological monism and its alternatives shaped the great German idealist Hegel's concept of dialectic. And through the German idealist Frederick Schelling this upheaval still influences the theology and theodicy of CK and kindred theologians today.²⁴

Why did Leibniz take these metaphysical evasive measures? Of his own private notes and papers, Bertrand Russell commented: "Here, as elsewhere, Leibniz fell into Spinozism whenever he allowed himself to be logical; in his published works, accordingly, he took care to be illogical."²⁵ These private papers reveal that he was almost persuaded by the logic of naturalistic ontological monism (Spinozism)²⁶ but shrank back, finding it threatening to the immortality of

¹⁹ Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World* (New York: Norton & Company, 2006), 278.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 278.

²¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: John Noon, 1738), 240–1.

²² Chronicled in the new and massive ~2,800 pages of the four volume history of the European Enlightenment from 1650 to 1800 by Jonathan Israel (2001 through 2013). Israel starts with the early radical Enlightenment in the Dutch republic, traces the battle between the radical-democratic, the moderate-aristocratic, and the counter-Enlightenments across the continent, in Russia, and in the Americas. He traces the historical documents through the French Revolution, the *Rights of Man*, and ends with the counter-Enlightenment coup that brought Robespierre to power in 1793.

²³ Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic* (2006), 310: Leibniz and Spinoza may be thought of as archetypal human responses to modernity.

²⁴ Philip Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit: God, World, Divine Action*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

²⁵ Bertrand Russell (1900). *The Philosophy of Leibniz*. (London: Routledge, 1992).

²⁶ Gottfried Leibniz made a furtive trip to meet Spinoza in the Hague in November of 1676—an unrecorded meeting of two of the titans of Western thought—discussed along with details of his struggles with Spinozism in Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic* (2006).

the soul, the doctrine of the Trinity, theistic morality, and theodicy. CK seems to have the same problem at least with regard to the theistic morality and theodicy. CK abandon their ostensible monism (“anomalous” “emergent” or otherwise) by postulating that “emergent complexity” will give them *gratis* hierarchical “levels” of physical, mental, and spiritual each of which have their own sets of causal properties, *implying that these are separable*. What they advocate *de facto* is a metaphysical substance pluralism like Leibniz but without saying so in *Predicament*.

The “causal closure of the physical world” is simply “the seamlessness of natural explanation” (58), which means that the universe is causally seamless, such that every effect emerges from efficient causes. This does not require that “the total amount of energy in the universe is fixed” (55), that is, a thermodynamically closed system. We do not know if our observable universe is thermodynamically open or closed and there’s no empirical reason to think seamless causality inconsistent with either option, so we won’t discuss it further here, except to note that seamless causality is important in a NEO-consistent world. Where we fully agree is that “reductionist philosophies of science are not able to tell the whole story of scientific knowledge” (56). Reductionism derives from the old paradigm of a mechanical materialism (see note 18). Modern science without contradiction uses methods both reductive and systems-based. We all agree that they are not mutually exclusive but both indispensable to a healthy scientific enterprise. Each are methodological with their strengths and limitations.

Also, we strongly agree that “it just isn’t true that the whole story can be told in neurological terms” (57). Neurons or molecules as minimal components *on their own* are not all there is to our experienced mental life. *The scientific evidence is overwhelming that mental life is inextricably and intrinsically neurological, bound up causally with dynamic and causal states of networks of neurons, in turn bound up with dynamic molecular systems, down to the quantum level, as well as up to the higher dynamic social group, community, habitat, and ecosystem levels, whatever else we may speculate or desire.* The entire contingent, multi-directional causal “hairball” was and is necessary to evolve and generate the lived experience of mental life. Billions of data points support upward and downward *causal inseparability*, and none are opposing.

Metaphysical fears? So, like Leibniz, Kant, Schelling, and others, from what are CK fleeing, even while they try to embrace it in a qualified form (anomalous monism or panentheism)? Throughout the history of thought the developing ideas of Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, Averroes/Ibn Rushd, Bruno, or Spinoza were feared as subversive and heretical. These heretics and mystics were groping toward the same reality that other great religious mystics in many traditions also espied: *the immanent infinity and unity of existence*. There is something terrifying in the simplicity, grandeur, and almost overwhelming self-evidence of the idea that there *ultimately* lurks intimately beneath everything *only one immanent infinite and creative reality, with its intrinsic mathematical rules of cause-effect, of which we and everything that is are finite elements.*²⁷ Whatever

²⁷ Despite the nineteenth century work of Georg Cantor on infinite sets and cardinalities of infinities, and the immediate immanence in modern science and mathematics of actual infinities through the application of real, transcendental, complex, algebraic number analyses, the calculus, particularly through ordinary and partial differential equations, and the higher algebras, etc., (not to bypass the ubiquitous reminders of

cosmology turns out to better approximate reality, whether yet another variation of the Λ CDM big bang, an oscillatory universe, inflationary universes in some multiverse, with expanding bubble universes as common as dandelions in spring, or some other more accurate model—all worlds would be mere modes of that one unified infinity. Whatever biological, organismal, ecological, and social complexities emerge, would all be causally intrinsic in this one immanent infinite reality in numerous interacting causal interchanges. The immanent oneness of infinite reality glimpsed by great non-religious as well as religious thinkers in every great religious tradition for centuries has a leveling effect on human pretensions and private worlds of illusion, whether of national glory, tribal privilege, ethnic superiority, in-group claims to divine favor or election, parochial theologies, or personal egocentric importance. The mystics and heretics were glimpsing the same one Reality. CK need not fear this, as we shall argue below.

Sole aims. CK close their discussion of science by stating that their “sole aim here has been to show that the realm of the mental represents at least one natural sphere in which divine action can occur, without overriding the regularities whose preservation is a necessary condition for the emergence of finite rational agents” (59). Their argument culminating in this “sole aim” seems (1) to reserve one area of the universe, the human brain, where God may still intervene to alleviate suffering without technically violating the NEO principle, thus an Irenaean world capable of the evolution of moral agents. And (2) to preserve human freedom from a reductionist “mechanical materialism” and its resulting “determinism.” Human freedom does not require any divorce from natural causation (see Appended Note).

The journey into science and its frontiers helps but little because the personal theistic problem of suffering and evil remains moral, not scientific. And nothing from the scientific investigation of the universe provides exemptions to the NEO principle. And even if exemptions existed, that is no excuse in a demonstrably unfair world.

“Does the Problem of Evil Now Return in a New Form?” (59)

Suppose that the mental is not governed by natural causation, ignoring the violation of the not-even-once principle. CK ask whether the problem of evil is really solved if God can intervene in the minds of people? For example, couldn't he have communicated a warning to those in the path of the December 2004 tsunami without altering the course of nature? Wouldn't God then be

infinity requiring renormalization in quantum electrodynamics and so on), at least some of the NIODA apologists seem to be fleeing, from actual infinity and unity. In this they follow Thomas Aquinas, the late Medieval “orthodox” persecutors of Nicolas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno, and the seventeenth and eighteenth century pious censors and proscribers of Spinoza—the heretic who conceptually and qualitatively anticipated Cantor by conceiving as actual both modal manifestations of infinities and substantive unitary infinity as immanent and indivisible (see not only the *Ethics*, but Letter XII). As far as I can tell, this does not include Clayton / Knapp, but some NIODA apologists seem to flee actual infinity for theological reasons, to protect their “orthodox” and very finite deity. We know today that Cantor was directly influenced by Spinoza's conception of infinity. See Paolo Bussotti and Christian Tapp, “The influence of Spinoza's concept of infinity on Cantor's set theory,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 40, no. 1 (2009): 25–35.

under moral obligation to intervene in every case where such intervention could make a better outcome? Or is divine thought so high above human thought that no communication is possible? Recognizing that any intervening communication violates NEO and fairness, CK propose another theory.

Axiological participation theory. CK warn against over-anthropomorphizing God, and suggest that divine communication may be *axiological* in that God would present each individual with a “value” which they are free to embrace or reject. In the *participatory theory of divine human agency*, where there is a universal divine lure or attraction, not necessarily non-personal, with individuated appeals to every creature “which only becomes a definite message as it is interpreted and formulated by each recipient” leading to a “dialectical fusion of agency... accompanying them on their journeys, inspiring their joys, and luring them, gently, into harmony with the divine will” (64-65). This participatory model has God “involved in every instance of human action and experience in ways that infinitely exceed our comprehension... [In] self-giving love... God participates with a[n]...intimacy that, once again, exceeds our imagination” (65-66). In short, God is involved and suffers more than anyone. Again, the problem for theodicy is that any participatory “lure” and capacity to respond are not fairly distributed. Also, there is still no solution for those disasters outside the control of human agency, because “such a God may not be able to stop a fatal mudslide, or warn the villagers” (65) in it’s path.

What about the ethics of God luring creatures subconsciously and unevenly?²⁸ Is the “lure” influence distinguishable from the evolutionary selection for adaptive thriving and flourishing, eusocial reciprocity, and biological empathy? Such a lure seems indistinguishable from our innate biological empathy, evolved eusociality, and conscience: “We are not alone in the universe. We have each other.”²⁹ But where is the justice in a non-egalitarian personal lure? Isn’t a personal God still inevitably showing favoritism? Whatever befalls sentient beings for good or ill is not distributed evenly, but “time and chance happens to all” (Eccl. 9:11).

Are any of these attempts really a solution, whether or not in violation of the NEO principle? The world is empirically unfair. Do these attempts justify the misery of the smallest, uncomprehending creature? CK reference a dialogue in Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*; when Alyosha is asked whether he would agree to the torture to death of one tiny baby to insure future human happiness, he replies, “No, I wouldn’t consent.”³⁰ Among social animals the reciprocal altruistic signaling to avoid conflict or secure favors can become costly. When misdirected by humans toward invisible “beings” and “deities” the cost of placation without reciprocation can become unhinged—the desperate logic and horrific results of human sacrifice and forms of self-immolation appear in human (pre-)history, in almost every religious tradition, including Christianity.

²⁸ Dialogue with fellow reviewer James Walters brought the specific questions in this paragraph to my attention.

²⁹ Attributed to humanist scholar Corliss Lamont.

³⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf, 1992).

For CK, the problem of suffering and evil returns with a vengeance. There is no evidence that the mental is beyond natural causation, and the data overwhelmingly show that it isn't. But even if the mental were claimed to be exempt from natural causation, the problem persists, the same as if God were claimed to intervene regularly in nature. The *Tetralemma* of Epicurus endures, but a "lure" toward the moral comprises common ground, however unfair the world.

Mortality and "the Eschatological Dimensional" (66)

CK respond to the second part of the "argument from neglect" asking, what if Wildman's objection is correct and there is no personal God? Does theism have moral relevance in its non-personal form? At a minimum, argue CK, the moral relevancy of non-personal theism would be confined, to those who "already, as the Gospel saying goes, 'have their reward'" (66). Mortalism is the position that death is the end of personal existence, a natural, regenerative part of life.³¹ Many of the greatest thinkers in history were mortalists, as were some of the Bible writers. Life does not become less precious or devoid of happiness because it is passing, but rather the opposite, because life encompasses far more than our individual egos. Generations of large stars lived and perished in fiery explosions yielding the elements for life and planets such as Earth. Species went extinct, leaving ecological niches for new species. Generations have offspring, and then pass on leaving the next generation. This process can be viewed as self-giving, as kenotic. Our individual lives, whether selfish or shining outward with love, are all we give back to the universe which through our ancestors gave us being. Facing personal mortality with dignity and unselfishness is a fitting epitaph on a life well-lived.

If God is non-personal, they say, "then suffering in this life, and indeed the fate of the vast majority of all human beings who have ever lived, is unredeemed and unredeemable, and their hope is not only false but cruel. There can be no hope of any future consummation" (66). Exactly what, they ask, is "the moral contribution of such despair to 'the practical moral struggles of our deeply unjust world'?" CK charge that to question theodicy under "such despair" is to commit an *ad hominem tu quoque* (appeal to hypocrisy).³² No. It's *not* the critic who acquits a personal deity of all responsibility for "our deeply unjust world" by appealing to an unknown afterlife. On the contrary, linking theodicy to an afterlife and morality to future reward or punishment, is probably *the* ethical low point of person-language theism. CK agree that it is moral immaturity to see a zero-sum between an afterlife and cheap hedonism, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." A moral person lives thus because it is right, not because of postmortem pay-

³¹ Beautiful popular and curricular work on the generative meaning of death has been done by liberal Christian Michael Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion will Transform your Life and our World* (New York: Viking, Penguin Group, 2008), chapter 3, cf. <http://evolutionarychristianity.com/blog/thank-god-for-death-could-anything-be-more-sacred-more-necessary-more-real/>; and by atheist science writer and spouse Connie Barlow (<http://www.thegreatstory.org/death-programs.html>).

³² *Ad hominem tu quoque*, literally "attack the man [by querying] you too?" i.e., a "pot-calling-the-kettle-black"ism.

off or payback.³³ The moral imperative of “our deeply unjust world” is to fight for a freer, happier life for others and to alleviate their life-suffering now. And that imperative rests urgently upon us today as mortals—not as immortals in waiting.³⁴

The “hope of eschatological fulfillment,” according to Wildman, raises the problem of God being “morally inconsistent” across all “cosmological epochs” (66). In response, CK assert that God’s ultimate purpose across all epochs is creating moral agents to respond to his love. “In short, it is perfectly possible for God to create other and better worlds without contradicting what, on our hypothesis, was God’s purpose in creating this one. And that hypothesis, we submit, provides a sufficiently plausible answer to the argument from neglect” (68). *Hoc non est quod demonstrandum erat*—Nothing is demonstrated! To the upturned, tear-stained little face of a hurting child, what kind of answer is that? It’s all better—somewhere else! The *Tetralemma* of Epicurus remains.³⁵

Reflections on the Ultimate

CK’s preferred theology is pantheism³⁶—God envelopes and is other than the world. In *Adventures in the Spirit* (2008), Clayton’s preferred metaphysics is Arthur Peacock’s *emergent monism*, in which the universe is *neither physical nor mental, nor simultaneously both*, but rather exists on different levels chronologically and then simultaneously—as pointed out, substance

³³ Albert Einstein, in an address on “Science and religion” at the Princeton Theological Seminary, 19 May 1939; published in *Out of My Later Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), said: “...whoever has undergone the intense experience of successful advances made in this domain [natural sciences or we might add, in philosophy, religion, or the arts] is moved by profound reverence for the rationality made manifest in existence. By way of the understanding he achieves a *far-reaching emancipation from the shackles of personal hopes and desires*, and thereby attains that humble attitude of mind toward the grandeur of reason incarnate in existence, and which, in its profoundest depths, is inaccessible to man. This attitude, however, appears to me to be religious, in the highest sense of the word” (emphasis added).

³⁴ Bertrand Russell, “A free man’s worship,” *Independent Review* (December, 1903), wrote eloquently of the mortalist moral imperative: “The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Very brief is the time in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided. Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instil faith in hours of despair. Let us not weigh in grudging scales their merits and demerits, but let us think only of their need—of the sorrows, the difficulties, perhaps the blindnesses, that make the misery of their lives; let us remember that they are fellow-sufferers in the same darkness, actors in the same tragedy with ourselves. And so, when their day is over, when their good and their evil have become eternal by the immortality of the past, be it ours to feel that, where they suffered, where they failed, no deed of ours was the cause; but wherever a spark of the divine fire kindled in their hearts, we were ready with encouragement, with sympathy, with brave words in which high courage glowed.”

³⁵ David Hume stated in eighteenth century terms what is still applicable to a traditional theology: “God’s power is infinite. Whatever he wills is executed but neither man nor other animals is happy. Therefore he does not will their happiness. Epicurus’s questions are yet unanswered.” Cited in http://www.secularsites.freeuk.com/jonathan_miller_quotes.htm.

³⁶ Pantheism is not as alien to Hebrew Scriptural and New Testament thought as often imagined. That the Jewish wisdom tradition with Hellenistic Stoicism influenced later Jewish literature / cosmology, including some of the theology of Paul and most significantly the *logos* poem in John 1, has been well established in James D. G. Dunn’s *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry Into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989)—a point completely missed by the neo-Platonist, post-Chalcedon, Trinitarian christologies.

pluralism, not monism at all. Literature on the venerable tradition of panentheism, including Clayton's co-authored and co-edited works (2004, 2014), shows that panentheists seem to lapse back toward dualism, frequently juxtaposing “matter” and “spirit” and kindred concepts as ontological dualities.³⁷ If human mental properties emerge from the physical complexity of the brain and central nervous system, why not have God emerge from the cosmos as in *radically emergent theism*? According to Clayton, this is not desirable nor logically compelled “because” his task is to find an emergent theology which is consistent with an emergent “downward causal” view of agency and “adequate to the Christian tradition” where God pre-exists the world.³⁸ He proposes a *moderately emergent theism* (akin to process theology) in which God has two natures—one antecedent and one consequent.

No analogies for the ultimate. CK see personhood, mind, and agency as “higher order properties,” therefore God must be a person.³⁹ This seems to be thinly disguised anthropocentrism. Other than the human need to relate to a person, why would God be analogous to a human person, since an ecosystem of persons, or the entire biosphere of a living planet like Earth, which contains humans, is that much more complex and grand? Why not make a planetary biosphere an analogy for divinity, or an inhabited galaxy of millions of interacting intelligent life-containing planets, or better yet, the entire universe? Why use the highly provisional individually focused consciousness as an analogy for an infinite divine “awareness” or “unconsciousness”? Best yet, why use analogies at all?

Analogical conceptions of the ultimate are unnecessary. Consider the *Tao Te Ching* (道德經, sixth century BCE), Part 7:⁴⁰

The Tao is infinite, eternal.
 Why is it eternal?
 It was never born;
 Thus it can never die.
 Why is it infinite?
 It has no desires for itself;
 Thus it is present for all beings.

The *Tao Te Ching* and other traditions in the East as well as the best thought in the Western traditions expose at least two significant errors of personalistic theism. (1) *Loss of infinity*—Personhood, agency, mind, consciousness, subjectivity, desires, loves, hates, preferences, jealousies, yearning for praise, hopes and dreams are all in the nature of a finite, bounded being

³⁷ Philip Clayton, *In whom We Live and Move and Have our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004); John W. Cooper, *Panentheism, the other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); Loriliai Biernacki and Philip Clayton, *Panentheism across the World's Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³⁸ Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit* (2008), 102.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁰ Full a full English text of the *Tao Te Ching*, see the translation by S. Mitchell (last updated 20 July 1995; <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/core9/phalsall/texts/taote-v3.html#7>; accessed 22 April 2012).

who can contemplate what is outside and beyond itself. *The immanent nature of the infinite encompasses the all*. Postulating God as a personal agent choosing the particular laws of Nature makes God finite by placing Godself within, a subset of infinity. If God is an agent choosing among possible universes, fine-tuning or intervening, then both God and the universe would be contained within in a still-larger universe of those possibilities—God would be neither infinite nor unique—and so on *ad infinitum*.⁴¹ Reifying human characteristics, proximal and provisional as they are, as divine, ultimately reduces the divine. That is the second error of personalistic theism, one familiar in terminology to monotheists: (2) *idolatry*—setting up human conceptions as worthy of worship.⁴²

This idolatry is exposed by the universe unveiled by science, as Carl Sagan and others have pointed out, “A general problem with much of Western theology in my view is that the god portrayed is too small. It is a god of a tiny world [actually starting as a very tribal clan deity] and not a god of a galaxy much less of a universe.”⁴³ “The gods of the human primate from this little blue planet.... are too small and petty for the grandeur of the stars and universe. Human gods do not even cover the scale of the earth and its history much less the universe.”⁴⁴

In the West, many and competing conceptions of even the one God of monotheism, some with a horrific record of dogmatism, cruelty, and superstition, have evolved and disappeared with cultural, political, and other historical processes.⁴⁵ CK love science and seek a rational religious faith with a moral conception of divinity. They are to be thanked for that effort and would do well to go further and set aside the inadequate idolatries of western theological thought, however “orthodox” and sacralized by long ecclesiastical tradition they may be. The liberal and radical theologies have more daring insight: (1) God could have given birth to the universe, and kenotically died in childbirth, leaving the universe on its own (cf. Kabbalah). (2) In creating the universe, God could have become a shade, a scarcely real shadow of Godself, powerless and fading, as Loren Eiseley poetically suggested, “God himself may rove in similar pain up the dark roads of his universe.”⁴⁶ (3) God could *becoming*, an unfolding realization, as in radically-emergent theism or in the “omega” theologies of Teilhard de Chardin and Frank Tipler. (4) God

⁴¹ For a discussion on this infinite regress in the context of the world-view of Leibniz, see Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic* (2006).

⁴² Not known for understatement, Christopher Hitchens put it concisely, “Thus the mildest criticism of religion is also the most radical and devastating one: Religion is man-made.” Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, Hachette Book Group, 2007), 10.

⁴³ Carl Sagan, *The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God*, 1985 Gifford lectures, ed. Ann Druyan (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 30.

⁴⁴ From “To be Steeped in Natural History,” <http://www.pangeaprogress.com/blog/to-be-steeped-in-natural-history>. The philosopher George Santayana is also apt in his rejection of such idolatry: “My atheism, like that of Spinoza, is true piety towards the universe and denies only gods fashioned by men in their own image, to be servants of their human interests,” *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1922), 246.

⁴⁵ See the classic work of Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

⁴⁶ Loren Eiseley, *The Firmament of Time* (New York: Atheneum, 1960), 166, where he continues, “Only how would it be, I wonder, to contain at once both the beginning and the end, and to hear, in helplessness perhaps, the fall of worlds in the night?”—an unvarnished poetry of the problem of suffering and disaster. A kindred evocative poetic possibility (however unorthodox) is that a lonely deity is struggling in a universe beset by recurrent disaster and is in need of the forgiveness of the creatures of the universe.

could be the antecedent and consequent deity of process theology as in Alfred N. Whitehead. (5) Over the last three centuries with the Scientific Revolution, “death of god” thinkers / theathanatologists have contemplated the possibility that “God is dead” in some sense. These broadly include, among others, William Blake, Georg W. F. Hegel, Frederick Nietzsche, Paul Tillich, Thomas Altizer, and Slavoj Žižek.⁴⁷ (5) CK’s own tradition of panentheism tries to make sense of our world by enveloping it in God.

The limitation of every theology is that they are all human-made conceptions and yes, sublimations of our own deepest hopes, wishes, and contradictions.⁴⁸ And the weakness of all theologies, is that “they’re asking all the questions except the one that matters: *Is any of this true?*”⁴⁹ The burden of any claim remains with the claimant, particularly for moral claims. *Quod gratis asseritur, gratis negatur* goes the old Latin proverb,⁵⁰ well-paraphrased in Hitchens’s Razor: “What can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence.”⁵¹ Dismissing unfounded claims does not mean that there is no infinite *substance*, no Tillichean “ground of being,” no God or ultimate reality, but an important step toward finding that ultimate.

A summing up. In the end, we are left with a stark reality. Human-constructed deities, are not up to the task of resolving the problem of suffering—they cannot pass a parental responsibility test:

- In the world, in sentient beings, there exists drastic injustice, unfairness, and suffering, as well as goodness, happiness, and even justice. These stubborn facts, unevenly distributed, do not go away.
- Emergent complexity, biological agency, and downward causation are observed phenomena emerging naturally within a unified (monistic) world—requiring neither extraneous partial monism, substance pluralism, nor panentheistic dualism.
- Appeals to violations of the NEO principle (self-imposed but then disputed in CK’s theology) are vacuous on scientific, logical, and moral grounds. CK should not abandon NEO, even in the human mind.

⁴⁷ The “death of god” or *theathanatology*, whether envisaged by mystics, radical theologians, or secular philosophers, is an underestimated and re-emergent trend in Western thought ever since the Scientific Revolution and the early Enlightenment, with links to earlier mystics and their experience of the cosmic void or non-being; The first theathanatologist of the modern era was Christian mystic William Blake in the 1780s-90s. See Thomas J.J. Altizer, “William Blake and the Role of Myth in the Radical Christian Vision” in T. J. J. Altizer, William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966). Note also Richard L. Rubenstein, “God After the Death of God” in *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism*, second edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) 293–306. For a recent example, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009); And just published: Daniel J. Peterson, G. Michael Zbaraschuk, Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Resurrecting the Death of God: The Origins, Influence, and Return of Radical Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

⁴⁸ Sublimations “born of the refusal...to admit the cosmic darkness.... comforting illusions within the warm glow of which...to shelter...from the icy winds of the universe” according to Walter T. Stace (1948), *Man against Darkness and Other Essays* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967), 9.

⁴⁹ So queries a friend of mine, Steve Scianni, in pointing out the omission of this central theological question.

⁵⁰ Jon R. Stone, *The Routledge Dictionary of Latin Quotations: The Illiterati’s Guide to Latin Maxims, Mottoes, Proverbs, and Sayings*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 101.

⁵¹ Hitchens, *God is Not Great* (2007), 150.

- The evolution of deep (axiological) values of bio-empathy and eusocial reciprocity in sentient beings—whether or not co-experienced as a “lure” by them and a world-enveloping spirit—does not change that life is drastically unfair or that natural disasters occur beyond the control of finite minds.
- Nothing exempts a moral agent from moral action, whether conceived as a deity or not. Thoughtful humans have long known the answer to Euthyphro's question in Plato's *Dialogues: The gods must do right because it is right*, not because they are gods. No gods ever conceived by humankind are exempt from the parameters of the universe, whether causal or moral. Reality is greater than all the gods.
- Science is learning to repent of the confident, even dogmatic reductionism of its youthful exuberance, and must now soberly face the reality of complexity, emergence, and systems dynamics. Through greed and misuse of technology, we have polluted our planet and harmed fellow Earthlings. Religion needs to repent of multiplying god conceptions with their theologies, all too often dogmatic, fanatical, and superstitious, thus imposing miseries on humankind, and enabling planetary pollution and habitat destruction.
- Not only heretics and mystics, but philosophers, mathematicians, scientists, artists, and others more than ever have opportunity to contemplate the infinite,⁵² and embrace our duty to each other.

Anthropodicy

Suppose the great human questions as “Why suffering?” and “What is life’s meaning?” are addressed to us. Auschwitz survivor, existentialist, and psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl wrote, “Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is *he* who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by *answering for his own life*; to life he can only respond by being responsible.”⁵³

The universe in its stark beauty and vastness seems to have no answers *for us, apart from us*. From our evolutionarily-favored sociality and biological empathy, the only answer is *ours to give—action to relieve suffering and bring happiness to our fellow creatures—to heal our collapsing ecosystems through habitat restoration, to birth new planetary life-friendly democratic economic systems, and to establish justice and freedom for our fellow Earthlings*. Anthropodicy puts the onus on us—*we* must answer the world's suffering with our love—our empathy in action, what Jesus might have called, “the kingdom of God.” The hour is late. With CK, we unite for joint life-saving action with people of conscience in every community and religious tradition, among religious naturalists and the more secular. Morals and world-views are shifting toward reality.

⁵² As a practicing scientist, who also engages in meditation practice, I reach for the ultimate from both directions.

⁵³ Viktor E. Frankl (1959, 1962, 1984), *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 131.

We stand at a future-defining existential moment. Will we succeed in time? To live together responsibly in the great interconnected web of mutual reciprocity, would entail a participatory conception of the divine, a *telos* worthy of our best and of the immanent, infinite reality of it all.

On the other hand, to invent theodicies, whether by appeal to God's inscrutable purposes, to painful divine tests, to free will, to happy endings, or to benign neglect, is as intellectually unsatisfactory as it has been fruitless. Worse yet, theodicy-making may be not only immature but ultimately immoral. Theodicy-making justifies and prolongs suffering, and gives excuses for tyranny and oppression, as it has for centuries. It places on a deity what is our responsibility. The real dignity of humankind is moral adulthood.

Appended Note on Human Freedom⁵⁴

In lectures on religious naturalism (2007), Wesley Wildman⁵⁵ argues that there is an emerging strategic consensus in the science and philosophy of mind. Neither mind-body dualism, immaterial idealism, eliminative materialism nor epiphenomenalism are adequate to the complex data of human consciousness and behavior, including religious and spiritual experiences (RSEs). Instead the emerging consensus now is *di-polar monism*: "One kind of basic stuff with mental and material aspects." Three and a half centuries after the fact, that is Spinozism, except that Spinoza considered the attributes of "thought" and "extension" to be the only two attributes of infinite *substance* humans can perceive, out of an infinite number of divine attributes.

When Baruch de Spinoza, the son of a Portuguese *marrano* whose community had fled the Portuguese Inquisition to Amsterdam, was growing up, the Scientific Revolution was underway. As Augustine's bloodied "city of God," Medieval Christendom, was crumbling with the ending of the devastating religious Thirty Years War (1648), young "Bento" was thrown out of the synagogue for talking in strange ways about God or Nature. Choosing a new name, Benedict de Spinoza chose to live neither as Jew nor Christian but as a free man. Together with other dissenters first in the Dutch Republic, he became a founder of the Radical Enlightenment. Neither Descartes (dualism), Hobbes (early mechanical materialism), Leibniz (pluralism), nor Berkeley and Kant (idealism), from Enlightenment times have been as productive of ongoing questions in speculative philosophy, mathematics, neuroscience, psychology, and even the foundations of modern physics as has Spinoza (monism). One of the controversies over ontological monism since the Enlightenment is the question of determinism and free will.

⁵⁴ Human freedom has traditionally been interpreted as the old metaphysical dualist "free will" conception which is at best untenable and even incoherent in light of advances today. Hence, I prefer the term human freedom, which preserves what people value about freedom, without using the old term "free will." Philosophy can still afford us a provisional framework for considering ultimate questions (*ultima philosophia*) such as human freedom, even though the Scientific Revolution has dethroned philosophy as *prima philosophia* in the Aristotelian sense. See Zimmermann, *New Ethics Proved* (2010), 5.

⁵⁵ Wesley J. Wildman, in a 6-part lecture series, "Religious Experiences: From the Mundane to the Anomalous," Center for the Study of Religion and Psychology, Danielsens Institute, Boston University (2007): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j_IRGct1pc.

A striking breakthrough on human freedom came in the mid-twentieth century with a young philosophy graduate, novelist, playwright, and later French *Resistance* fighter against Nazi occupation, Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre was in rebellion against, yet deeply influenced by, the legacy of the Hegelian dialectic of German Idealism in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and by the existential views of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. During a few months in a Nazi camp, Sartre considered freedom in action phenomenologically. Once outside, he joined the French *Resistance* and rapidly wrote a major work, *Being and Nothingness* (1943).⁵⁶ A passionate critic of power both West and East through plays and other writings, he became one of the most influential of twentieth century thinkers. Three centuries apart, Spinoza and Sartre contributed to the question of human freedom.

Causal inseparability from the universe and human freedom? Grant all the scientific evidence that the physical causalities of the universe fully operate in the human brain. Then, all known brain and nervous system activities are causally-embedded in the universe, from the single membrane crossing of one sodium ion to the discordant neuron-firing of a *grande mal* seizure, to the intense activation of certain brain regions by beautiful music, profound wonder, grief, laughter, sexual arousal, or agonizing decisions, or the loss of some neural activity in sociopaths, and even the emergent interaction of many brains in social ecosystems. Also there is the genetic and epigenetic expression effecting and pre-dispositioning the brain and nervous system, personality, emotional outlook, and addictability. Are humans left unfree in any practical sense that matters for human wellbeing? No. So how can we still affirm human freedom?

Ontological monism. Objectively, like all living things, humans are causally-inseparable parts and products of Nature (Spinoza). So, “every human action must be conceived of as a manifestation of nature,”⁵⁷ specifically the nature of humans, mammals, vertebrates, animals, etc. Thus, every process in our behavior can be traced to efficient natural causes with “consistent” discoverable “causal closure,” but yet “in an intrinsically-contingent way” rather than a “fixed” algorithmic process.⁵⁸ How? Being modal parts of Nature, *humans simultaneously model Nature and self-model through a recursive process of incomplete approximations of the world in and around them via sensory input, reflective perception and semiotic interpretation.* This self-recursion is always incomplete, tentative, and contingent, under constant update by data from the “unobservable processes actually taking place”⁵⁹ within us and beyond. The diverse results of this recursive modeling by sentient beings (including humans) are objectively observed and *are* biological agency or freedom. Biological freedom can be objectively observed at different levels: (1) the creativity of solitary and social biological agents in environment-altering and self-transformation, and (2) the long term evolution of populations into new species adapting to almost every

⁵⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant: Essai d'Ontologie Phénoménologique* (Paris, Gallimard, 1943). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, transl. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

⁵⁷ Don Garrett, “Spinoza's ethical theory” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. D. Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 267–314.

⁵⁸ Zimmermann, *New Ethics Proved* (2010), 10–11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5–6, 10–11.

conceivable circumstance and environment. Life invents.⁶⁰ And in biological agents, there are “teleodynamic” downward causal changes. Objectively, the causal degree of complexity of the inventional behavior (solitary or social) is directly proportional to the “neural network connections” from the slightest “irritability” in microbes to the most complex sentient beings. Next we consider the subjective experience of freedom.

Existential and phenomenological. Subjectively, the recursive (self-)modeling of Nature is itself sentience, awareness, consciousness—a finite (semiotic) representation of the world entailing a self-representation. The world is what is, sheer facticity—“being-in-itself” (Sartre). Fragile and contingent, “consciousness is born supported by a being which is not itself.”⁶¹ This finite recursive (self-)representational “awareness” is causally-inseparable, with no real “distance” from the biological being. Hence, consciousness is the gaze “from nowhere,” a “nothingness,” “not a thing” or an object, but a *subject*, a “for-itself / for-others,” which is an “awakeness” or “presence” to being-in-itself, the facticity of the world. Finite recursive (self-)representation opens wide the possibilities of *negation*—(self-)representation of things as they are not, that is, an intention for things to be other than they are—a restless, never satisfied, intention-oriented process. That subjective awareness is not an ontological being but a “becoming” with “nothing” to prevent its continual self-invention. Thus, though causally-inseparable from the world, the finite, recursive “we” as *subjects* are free because we cannot be other than free. We are “thrown into the world,” “condemned to be free,” and “forlorn” with the angst of inescapably having to choose, to invent, to actualize, to commit, to make sense and find meaning. Our finite (self-)representations involve the “nothingness” of *negation*: What was but is no more (nostalgia), what might have been (regret, wistfulness), what may yet be (hopes, dreams, foreboding), what can never be (longing, despair), what is and why (sense-making, meaning-making, world-view making), and what is beyond our limits (the infinite). Sentient (self-)representational beings may interact empathically with semiotic reciprocity (an intersubjectivity of goodness, beauty, love), treat other sentients as “objects” mere assets to an end, or with reciprocal spite (an intersubjectivity of evil, exploitation, revenge). From this “nothingness” of freedom arises the heights of creative art, innovation, discovery, or the depths of self-deception (*mauvais fois*, bad faith)—the agony and ecstasy of the entire human moral universe.

Ontological monism and science. Therefore, causally embedded in the universe, as finite (self-)modelers of Nature we construct world-models. Uniting systematic observation, reason, and mathematics, we apprehend aspects of the world by means of infinity (*substance*). This includes both the vastly large and the infinitesimal through the behavior and properties of what exists in spatial-temporal dimensionality (*extension*) and the logical entailment (*thought*) of applying

⁶⁰ Biological agency or freedom or creativity is causally inseparable from but not reducible to a myriad facts in nature, some as lowly as the enormous possibilities of different chemical bonds because carbon has a valence of four with a medium electronegativity, or as striking as the relation that behavioral complexity varies directly with the neural complexity of the nervous system.

⁶¹ From different standpoints these two philosophers provide a helpful heuristic framework for the modern philosophy of mind and the neurosciences. See Kathleen Wider, “Sartre and Spinoza on the Nature of Mind,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 46 (2013): 555–575; 560.

mathematics with the infinities of real numbers, complex numbers, topologies, and various algebras. Thus linking the directly mappable correspondences between physical and mathematical properties and behaviors we can make rigorous, testable theories—from quantum electrodynamics to general relativity to game theory to population genetics. By means of our systematic, mathematical, recursive (self-)modeling of Nature, we begin to glimpse universal, unified causality—logical entailment where “thought is co-extensive with materiality.”⁶² *Ordo et connexio idearum idem, est ac ordo et connexio rerum*: “The order and connection of ideas corresponds to the order and connection of things,”⁶³ i.e., in mathematical terms, a mappable correspondence. Nature contains and is immanent, so that finite, (self-)representational modelers through observation and thought may apprehend attributes of the infinite: “Thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that.... [That is, both] in God—are one and the same thing, explicated through different attributes.” From a universal perspective, the converse equivalent holds: Infinite *substance* is distributively-structured “in terms of infinitely many self-representations, one of which is our” observable universe.⁶⁴ Infinite, unified, atemporal, undifferentiated *substance* is indistinguishable from the infinite non-being of the potential and the possible, and modally actualized in *what has become*—what is finite, modal, and temporal.⁶⁵ In short, if temporality only arises in the transition from the infinite to the modal (human) perspective,⁶⁶ even on those terms (momentarily setting aside the subjective, phenomenological, and existential), is there “still a problem of determinism”?⁶⁷ It is worth noting in this context that Whiteheadian process thought conceptions are in danger of attempting to absolute the finite, but that is another topic.

⁶² Margaret D. Wilson, “Spinoza's theory of knowledge” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 115.

⁶³ Benedict de Spinoza, in B. d. S., *Opera Postuma, Quorum Series Post Praefationem Exhibetur* (Amsterdam: Jan Rieuwertsz, 1677), Part II, Proposition VII. Rieuwertsz was the friend and book seller who secretly arranged the publication. (For a delightful annotated Internet English text from Elwes's translation of the *Ethics* including Spinoza's explanatory notes, see <http://www.yesselman.com/e2elwes.htm#VII>, part of a large website).

⁶⁴ Zimmermann, “Loops and Knots,” 15.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19. Compare Robert C. Neville's conception of non-being as indeterminate, and being as determinate, discussed in *Recovery of the Measure: Interpretation and Nature, Axiology of Thinking*, Vol. 2 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989).

⁶⁶ W. Bartuschat, *Spinozas Theorie des Menschen* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992), 85; Zimmermann, “Loops and Knots” (2000), 11.

⁶⁷ Zimmermann, “Loops and Knots” (2000), 11.