

A New Challenge to a Warfare Theodicy

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Abstract

Some Christian philosophers and theologians contend that an actual Satan along with his demons are (possibly) responsible for at least some natural evils (including animal suffering) prior to the creation of the first human beings. Theologian Gregory Boyd utilizes this approach in what he calls a “warfare theodicy” wherein such beings are construed as originating causes of (some) natural evils. Other thinkers, such as C. S. Lewis and Michael Murray, have pointed to such a theodicy as a mere possibility in blunting the problem of animal suffering as an instance of the problem of natural evil. In this paper, I challenge the warfare theodicy *qua* theodicy on inductive grounds and argue that there is no reason (outside of an *ad hoc* attempt to protect a warfare theodicy) to think that this appeal is justified since evil spirits likely do not directly interact with the physical universe in the ways necessary for a warfare theodicy to handle such natural evils.

Keywords: warfare theodicy, Devil, metaphysics, demonology, Satan

Philosophers inside and outside of the Christian tradition have offered up a painstaking series of defenses, and in some cases even full-blown theodicies, in order to deflect the impact the pervasiveness of evil has on the lowering of the probability of God’s existence. These philosophers have sought to avert criticisms of God’s existence predicated on the extent and nature of the various kinds of evil in the world. Diabolical defenses (hereafter DD), variously identified as the “Satan hypothesis” and the “fallen-angel hypothesis,” are defenses of God’s existence based on the idea that there are nonhuman arch-villains of God—Satan and his demons—that are fundamentally responsible for the natural evils that have existed in the world long before the arrival of autonomous *homo sapiens*. Some, like Gregory Boyd (1997; 2001), have intimated the substance of a DD such that it becomes (part of) a theodicy—that the active involvement of Satan and the demons is actually rightly explanatory of some of the natural evils that obtain. In Boyd’s case, it constitutes an essential part of what he calls a “warfare theodicy.” A number of contemporaries, like Michael Murray, Stewart Kelly, Terence Penelhum, C. S. Lewis et al are more modest in that they enlist DDs as conceptual alternatives appealing to Satan and his demons as mere possibilities for the origination of natural evil (Trethowan 1954: 128; Mascall 1956: 301-302; Lewis 1962: chapter 9; Penelhum 1971: 246; Kelly 1997: 29-42; Murray, 2008: 96-106). I will follow Boyd’s lead and refer to any actual or would-be theodicy that would incorporate the substance of a DD in explaining at least some natural evil as a Warfare Theodicy (hereafter WT). The appeal of WTs is twofold. First, they can account for the existence of natural evil apart from God’s creative and free will; hence, God cannot be made culpable on a traditional libertarian understanding of free will. Secondly, WTs ground the existence of natural evil in autonomous beings *prior to* the arrival of human beings. This is to say that it blunts a problem emphasized by John Hick (1990) who has confessed on behalf of the modern mind that “it is no longer possible to regard the natural evils [...] as consequences of the fall of humanity, for we now know that they existed long before human beings came upon the scene” (43). WTs circumvent this historical challenge pure and simple. The theist is now permitted to draw from an Augustinian theodicy in its reducing of all evil (both moral and non-moral) to the immoral choices exercised by autonomous beings that are not God.²

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² Part of Augustine’s explanation for why Satan and the demons are permitted to wreak their havoc upon creation is because these creatures serve as God’s punitive arm in meting out punishment against mankind (387-389/1993: 92-93).

In this paper, I will interact with contemporary appeals to DDs toward the advancement of WTs and argue that such projects, once we have an adequate understanding of what we are entitled to believe about Satan and the demons, do not plausibly serve to explain the origin of (some) natural evils. (DDs, as mere counter-possibles, are not necessarily precluded, however, insofar as they are merely logical objections to certain versions of the problem of evil.) I shall begin by explaining in more detail what these WTs are, followed by a discussion about why WTs are problematic. But let us first turn our attention to an elucidation of the distinction between WTs and DDs (cf. Evans 2013, 5ff).

DDs and WTs

Natural evil, as opposed to moral evil, is typically identified as suffering that obtains in sentient beings (whether human or animal) resulting from the natural occurrences of normal physical processes. These include, but are not limited to, the occurrences of earthquakes, tsunamis, avalanches, hurricanes, diseases, and the like. The obvious challenge to classical theism is how the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect creator-God is thought to be compatible with the occurrences of such natural evils. While the typical (Augustinian) Free Will Defense assumes that the existence of all natural evils have their genesis in the Fall of the first humans, Adam and Eve, not all natural evils could have arisen as a consequence of that singular event. Our violent history from the Big Bang creation event to the creation and development of earth's living inhabitants prior to the arrival of *homo sapiens* evidences this fact. Such a scenario implies, then, that God is perhaps the architect of (some) natural evils that ensue. (This is, after all, the biblical position on the matter; e.g. Deuteronomy 29.22; Isaiah 45.7.) But in blunting this implication, theistic philosophers can offer up a DD that relocates the origin of (some) natural evils to a nonhuman cause that isn't God, namely Satan and his rebellious angels. DDs, then, allow one to offer up a possible scenario whereby the origin of natural evils can be conceivably traced to the actions of a race of free beings prior to the first humans. And that's all that they do. For example, in borrowing from Augustine's Christian worldview, Alvin Plantinga (1977) famously offers up just such a DD. He writes:

Satan, so the traditional doctrine goes, is a mighty nonhuman spirit who, along with many other angels, was created long before God created man. Unlike most of his colleagues, Satan rebelled against God and has since been wreaking whatever havoc he can. The result is natural evil. So the natural evil we find is due to free actions of nonhuman spirits (58). Of course Plantinga invokes this to show that it is merely possible that all evil including all natural evil is the result of free creatures still, thus showing that the existence of God so conceived is compatible with the existence of natural evil. And it is offered only as a way to conceive of how God's existence is logically consistent with the existence of said natural evil. This is why Plantinga's approach is merely a DD and not a WT—a point he makes explicit elsewhere.³

Boyd has actually lamented the fact that a number of Christian thinkers tend to overlook the devil's active role in formulating a defense of God's existence in the face of natural evil. He complains that they "fail to incorporate the possibility that there is a sinister agent(s) who is largely responsible for corrupting nature. None of them seriously enough considered the one whom Scripture traces the origin of all evil to: Satan" (2001:291). More recently, Murray thinks that conventional Fall-based defenses or theodicies (cf. Augustine) that exclusively locate the causes of natural evils in the first humans ultimately fail to take seriously the pervasive nature and impact of those natural evils (2008:73-96). But he also thinks one can parlay the advantages of Fall-based theodicies in pointing to a pre-human Fall of demons as free creaturely agents that can effectively frustrate an otherwise sublime world.⁴ Murray's presentation follows that of Boyd (2001:293-318) and C. S. Lewis (1962) in highlighting specifically animal suffering as something that surely existed prior to the human Fall. Murray writes:

[We can] suppose that there are nonhuman free creatures which experienced a Fall prior to the Fall of Adam. Perhaps animal pain and suffering is to be explained not by the Fall of Adam, but by the Fall of Satan. [...]

³ "This suggestion [of a DD] is not at present widely popular in Western academia, and not widely endorsed by the contemporary intellectual elite. But it is less than clear that Western academia has much to say by way of evidence against the idea" (2016: 377).

⁴ Murray categorizes this as a *causa dei* (40). A *causa deñs* a possible scenario borrowed from a wider theological worldview within Christianity that can be invoked merely to defend God's innocence. It is not intended to offer a probable explanation for the origin of any natural evil.

On this [view] sin, pain, and death were present before the advent of human beings, having been introduced as a result of an angelic Fall (96-98).⁵ One can imagine variations of such a defense, but in common is the origin of natural evil being attributed to the actions of Satan and the demons some time prior to and perhaps after the arrival of the first human beings. Defending God's existence by appealing, at least in part, to Satan and the demons as the primary culprits of natural evils is at the heart of all DDs and WT's alike.

The Christian philosopher can avail herself of its rich theological backdrop in offering a possible defense of God's existence in the face of natural evil. There seems to be nothing metaphysically impossible or offensive about demons being blamed for perturbing certain natural forces or objects in nature, provided that one is not a naturalist. In short, DDs are grafted merely to avert a problem with creation but have an initial plausibility given Christianity's doctrine of demonology. But formulating or endorsing something like a WT may come at a high price. Boyd explains (2001:303):

[C]ritics may question exactly how satanic forces are supposedly behind earthquakes, famines and the like. They may question how this warfare understanding is consistent with our knowledge of the natural causes of these phenomena. They may also want us to clarify how the animal kingdom has been adversely affected by evil spirits or specify which aspects of the animal kingdom and of nature as a whole are the result of this sinister influence and which are not.

Murray is also aware that DDs (and so WT's) imply certain grand preternatural powers had by Satan and the demons (2008:103-104):

How much control over the cosmic environment can be ceded depends on what sorts of powers one takes these angelic beings to have. Could these beings, for instance, have exercised control over which natural laws obtain in our physical cosmos, over the quantity of matter the universe contains, over the speed with which habitable planets came into being, over the course of natural selection, over the genotype of various organisms or genotypic variation over evolutionary history? Could these beings be to blame for the fact that human beings often have bad backs, myopia, liability to cancer and heart disease? Could their activity explain the fact that animals react to potentially injurious stimuli with both avoidance behavior *and* qualitatively painful accompanying mental states? Are fallen angels to blame for the fact that living sentient organisms are not naturally immortal? For the theist who is inclined to believe in the existence of powerful and yet fallen disembodied angelic beings, it is hard to be confident that the answers to these questions is no.

Accordingly, he maintains that "appeals to the Fall of Satan and his cohorts [is] defensible" (106). As long as such an approach is "defensible," DDs are fair game for assuaging the implications of (some) natural evils. While DDs can be logically attractive, there is a new but significant challenge to consider if we are to take them as WT's *viz.* as *plausible* explanations for the existence of those natural evils. Let us now turn to what this challenge is.

A Challenge to WT's

I shall assume first and foremost that there are such supernatural beings as fallen angels or demons whose chief is Satan.⁶ While objecting to the existence of such beings would obviously forego WT's as viable theodicies, this option is not available to demonological realists. Furthermore, I shall assume that there are no good philosophical grounds for rejecting the logical or metaphysical possibility of there being nonhuman persons that are purely immaterial. This is to say that for any given nonhuman person, such as an angel or demon, it is possible that that nonhuman person is an immaterial being. I take it that God is, after all, an actual example *par excellence* of this kind of ontology. I shall also assume that the Bible provides justification for thinking that Satan and the demons are indeed purely immaterial, nonhuman persons.⁷

⁵ It is important to stipulate that a DD is not the only way to handle the problem of animal suffering. For example, Trent Dougherty (2014) imports the Irenean theodicy of "soul-making" and applies it in his attempt to explain why God allows animals to suffer.

⁶ Some have insisted on a distinction between fallen angels and demons. It is not important that this be true for one can affirm such a distinction without there being any substantial changes to the dialectic over WT's.

⁷ Judges 9.23; Luke 7.21; 8.2; Acts 19.12-16; Ephesians 6.12. For some notable medieval philosophers who affirmed the demons' pure immateriality, see Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, IV. 1; Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia Dei* VI. 6; id., *Summa Theologiae*, I. 55. 2; id., *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* IX. 2. Some contemporary philosophers also affirm the demons'

For most demonologies prior to the Scholastics considered demons to be aerial beings whose natures could be condensed so as to allow them to intercourse with a grossly material universe. But the dominant pure immaterialism that arose out of (Dominican) Scholasticism precludes this as an alternative solution. It is a widespread and traditional belief that Satan and the demons do sometimes interact with the world in that they are *at least* responsible for some things like temptations, leading people astray, and inflicting certain kinds of sicknesses and disorders on people. The problem that arises is, as Boyd and Murray acknowledge, *to what extent* Satan and the demons interact with this world beyond these. Assumed in any DD and WT is that demons (with Satan being among them) can directly interact with and manipulate parts of the physical universe. Stipulating that demons are immaterial spirits, one wonders if they lack a “natural” ability to interact with a material world just as disembodied human spirits do, for immaterial substances are incommensurable with material substances without there being a special provision for such interaction.⁸ This seems demonstrably true, for I cannot causally act upon angels or demons or disembodied humans at will. Indeed, in order for something physical to interact with something nonphysical (or vice versa), there needs to be a way to account for such interaction. Substance dualists can accommodate a special instance of human physical-nonphysical interaction by appealing to the notion that nonphysical human souls are paired with (Descartes), or inform (Aquinas), their physical bodies (by God no less). Moreover, such a relation is involuntary, for one’s spirit does not act upon its body *at will*. But demons neither pair with nor inform the physical world (which would otherwise imply that the world was somehow part of the identity of the demon) and if they did, their actions would be at will; thus, the pairing/informing relation cannot be imported to explain demonic interaction with the world. It remains problematic, then, that demons can, *ceteris paribus*, interact with physical objects and forces in the world at will. It is possible to solve this problem by supposing that demons have been given some kind of mysterious power – a power perhaps given to them by God in their original state as good angels that grants them the ability to interact with the world in the way necessary for WTs to work. This view has been widely held amongst traditionalists.⁹

Let us refer to this auxiliary ability of the demons to interact with the world as *psychokinesis* (hereafter PK). PK has been used already in the philosophical literature to refer mostly to the general ability of (embodied) *humans* and some animals to voluntarily interact with physical objects that are not their own bodies (cf. Braude 1979, 1986). I am using this term more loosely to designate a spirit’s (whether human or nonhuman) ability to somehow interact with physical objects in the universe other than its own body.

Herein lies the problem: Even though a PK ability is possible for any immaterial being, for this is the case with God, I shall show that there is no good reason to think that demons have any such ability. And if they do not have such an ability, they would be unable to interact with objects and forces in the physical world at will. And if they are unable to interact with objects and forces in the physical world at will, then the necessary component for WTs to be explanatory of natural evil (i.e. the bringing about of natural evils) is threatened.

pure immateriality. See Adler (1982: 159), Kreeft (1995: 91), and Williams (2002: 90). Many contemporary theologians concur. See Dickason (1975: 124), Unger (1994: 63-64), Rhodes (1994: 76), Oropeza (1997: 55), Ice and Dean (2000: 14, 19).

⁸ Even substance dualists insist on there being a *pairing* relation between a person’s immaterial soul and their body. This implies that an immaterial soul does not have the unaided ability to interact with just any physical object. Theists happily credit God for creating the anthropological pairing relation. Non-theists must bite the bullet and consider the relation inexplicably primitive.

⁹ Justin Martyr, to cite an early example, referred to these demonic powers as “magical impositions” (155-157/1886:17). The inaugural Reformer, Martin Luther, states that “[n]o malady comes upon us from God, who is good, and wishes us well; they all emanate from the devil, who is the cause and author of plagues, fevers, etc.” 1566/1902: 250) and that “all grave infirmities are blows and strokes of the devil [...] and that the] devil has other means of injury; he poisons the air, etc.” (256). Mortimer J. Adler writes that angels in general “can cause bodily alterations and the motion of bodies from one place to another” and “can move bodies without resorting to corporeal instrumentalities” (1982: 74-5). Kurt Koch specifies that Satan is someone who aggressively “has the power to bind people to himself, and to thereby enforce his will upon them and even to afflict them with various diseases while they remain prisoners to him” (1972: 137-8); Clinton E. Arnold extends their power by declaring that Satan “is the animating power behind [...] magic and sorcery” (1997: 1078). C. Samuel Storms writes that “[d]emons can also physically assault someone and cause physical affliction” (2013: 158). C. Fred Dickason says that “[d]emons can produce deceptive ‘miracles.’ Like their leader, the devil, they may interfere in the laws of nature” (1975: 178). Gregory J. Riley affirms that Satan “uses physical disease to harm and humble the sufferer (cf. [...] 2 Cor. 12:7)” (1999: 249). Peter Kreeft says that demons have certain innate powers, including the “ability to move matter supernaturally” which enables them to “manipulate any material vehicles on occasion, including animals” (1995: 114, 123). These all seem to be either explicit or implicit endorsements of some kind of ability of demons to interact with the physical world.

Thus, the falsity of demons having a PK power (or “demonic PK” for brevity’s sake) implies the implausibility of WTs. I shall now proceed to argue that Satan and the demons lack a PK ability.

Two Arguments against the Notion that Demons have PK to Enact Natural Evils

In this section, I shall defend two arguments that, especially when taken cumulatively, serve as the basis of the improbability of the fact of demonic PK and the *extent* of that PK necessary to enact the natural evils attributed to Satan and his demons. The two arguments are as follows: (i) demons probably do not have the sort of PK power necessary to bring about the sorts of natural evils that WTs attribute to them since even how the *good* angels interact with this world is the result of *God’s* causal intervention, not as the result of an intrinsic PK power; and (ii) since the prospect of a creative power to generate diseases and perform miracles is without precedent and inappropriately attributes divine powers to Satan and the demons, then if demons are responsible for the sorts of evils that WTs require, it is objectionable that they would be capable of such extraordinary actions. In support of the first argument, it is customary to assume that demons are thought to derive from the good angels (allegedly having been good angels themselves), even though this is disputable.¹⁰ As such, if *they* depend on God’s intervention in order to interact with the world for even simple tasks, then we should not expect the demons to have a power the angels do not. Since God intervenes on behalf of angels in order to accomplish their tasks, it follows that the angels likely do not have it intrinsically on pain of superfluity and, so, neither do the demons. In the second argument, I contend that even if demons had *some* kind of power, it cannot be to the extent that it leads to extraordinary acts like miracles which are considered to be the preserve of God. I shall ultimately argue that, based on these two arguments, one should think that demons lack a PK ability and, so, demons likely cannot perform the feats necessary for WTs to get off the ground. Let us now look in more detail at the two arguments that constitute my cumulative challenge to WTs.

On the Angelic Dependence on God

It is true that we lack any detailed Scriptural data about what angels are explicitly capable of apart from God’s interventions.¹¹ Nevertheless, I intend to argue that, as far as we can tell from the Bible, angels do not have PK: God always intervenes on their behalf. From this it is reasonable to think that demons do not have PK either. Additionally, it is implausible to suppose that God would intervene to do the bidding of demons. If these facts are true, this line of reasoning would constitute a substantial threat to any WT.

To begin with, the Bible contains some passages that explicitly credit God for the angelic interactions with this world. For one, consider the account of Balaam’s riding of his jenny which includes Balaam’s seeing an angel (Numbers 22.26-31). Verse 31 says, “Then *the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam*, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed all the way to the ground.” Regardless whether this is intended as literal truth or as fable, the salient point is that the author credits the Lord as the sole cause of Balaam’s seeing an angel interrupting his journey.¹² And the accomplishment itself was only that of being seen – a seemingly modest feat at that. Consider next Revelation 7.2-3.

¹⁰ There is no *explicit* mention in all of Scripture about Satan’s being a fallen angel. In fact, with some possible exceptions, there is little about whether Satan was ever *not* the enemy of God. In John 8.44, Jesus declares that the devil “was a murderer from the beginning” (*anthrōpoktonosēnap’ arēbēs*) perhaps implying that the devil has always been a malevolent creature. Satan’s being in charge of these fallen angels and commanding them for his own purposes corresponds to Michael’s commanding of the good angels (see Revelation 12.7-9). In 12.9 and 20.2, and perhaps also in 13.2, 4, 11, and 16.13, Satan is even called a “dragon” (*drakon*). Such imagery likely suggests a sort of dark counter-image to the angels being portrayed as winged creatures (Exodus 25.20; Isaiah 6.2; Ezekiel 1; 10; 11.22; Revelation 4.8; 9.9) that are also associated with “fire” (Hebrews 1.7). That Satan appears to be Michael’s counterpart is subtly present in the New Testament (cf. Jude 9). While not a demonstrable truth, it seems more probable than not that Satan was indeed one of the good angels – perhaps one of the more high-ranking angels given his “prince” status (Ephesians 2.2) – prior to his present malevolent status.

¹¹ “Because it is impossible to see an angel in its natural condition or to observe an angel’s cognitive processes at work, the theologian can learn of the nature of the angels either from revelation or from the use of philosophical concepts and principles and analytical or discursive reasoning. Scripture [...] does not examine the nature of the angels in any detail” (Keck 1998: 75).

¹² Perhaps the same point can be made of II Kings 6.15-17: When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servants said, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (II Kings 6.15-17).

Herein the author describes “four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea.”¹³ Observable activities of the angels in this case their physical interaction with the material world is attributed to God’s bestowing of said power as the occasion demands. Since angels are consistently declared to be dispatched and resourced by God,¹⁴ along with the explicit references to God’s actions as the direct causes of various angelic intra-worldly interactions, then these are feats they cannot accomplish on their own on pain of divine superfluity. The evidence indicates, then, that angels do not have a natural ability to interact with the physical world and so they do not have PK. So understood, any angelic interaction with this world, no matter how subtle (like an apparition) or how grand (like affecting the land and sea), is not of their own doing but of God’s.

Rather than see God’s role as redundant, God’s role is instead the means by which angels carry out their intra-worldly tasks, no matter how small or grand. Of course if this is evidently true of the good angels then it is *a fortiori* true of the demons. And if Satan is one of these angels, but now in a state of rebellion and, so, not under God’s provisional power, neither can Satan perform such tasks independently. But even if one is willing to bite the bullet and, in an *ad hoc* manner, stubbornly adopt the view that demons can interact with the physical world nonetheless, the implications raise further problems that make demonic PK an unbelievable option. For even if they did possess an ability to interact with the world, such interaction would involve extraordinary power on a par with God’s own. This leads us now to the next argument under consideration.

On the Prospect of Demons Having a Creative Power

Surely if demons do accomplish anything extraordinary on a par with miracles, it must be that they are somehow intrinsically gifted by virtue of their species. For God would not be an ancillary resource for demons. This is to say that if demons do have PK, then they acquired it when God created all angels in the beginning. But not only would they be able to effortlessly move upon nature as a consequence, they would be able to manipulate it to the extent of causing substantial physical and chemical changes in the universe. This is especially true if Satan and his minions cause extensive and long-lasting physical damage to our universe. DDs and WTs imply that Satan and the demons are indeed capable of widespread cosmological and biological changes that lead to ubiquitous consequences like animal suffering and diseases. As Murray himself claims, demons have “control over the cosmic environment” and that demons can cause in humans “bad backs, myopia, liability to cancer and heart disease” (2008:103-104). The demons’ PK power would not be a subtle one but would seem to be on the same tier as divine miracles!

However, it is inappropriate that demons would have the intrinsic power to effect the kinds of changes necessary to facilitate the natural evils envisaged in DDs and WTs. We know that God effects grand changes in the universe; would not attributing to demons similar powers seem like an encroachment upon the divine prerogatives if taken to the extent of controlling cosmology and biology? It is especially inappropriate to assign creative properties that belong solely to God and apply them to God’s archenemies, the demons. For demons would themselves be responsible for (co-)creating natural laws, liabilities, and powers. (The notion of Satan-as-(co-)creator may have been one of the motivating reasons for Augustine’s post-conversion resistance to a Persian-influenced Manichaeism).¹⁵ By supposing that demons can cause physical suffering in people (such as the imparting of diseases) or alter the cosmic environment, such power treads dangerously on creative prerogatives that are exclusive to God.

The problem intensifies when we consider the *purpose* of miracles. According to the New Testament, miracles serve as observational validations of God’s revelations and self-disclosure (Hebrews 2.4). And yet if an outside observer perceived the putative effects of a demon, she would not be able to discern such actions from those of God. The early eighteenth-century theologian William Fleetwood argues thusly: “I can never believe the Devil, or any other, by his Assistance, can work true Miracles, in Opposition to God: Nor can I believe that any false ones can be wrought by the Devil or his Agents, so as to impose upon the Senses of a sober, prudent, and attentive Person, where Truth is concern’d. [...]”

¹³ Emphasis mine. Blount (2009) writes of this episode that the angelic power “was not something the angels acquired on their own; it was given (*edothē*) to them by God” (141).

¹⁴ See Psalm 91.11 (cf. Matthew 4.6; Luke 4.10); Matthew 13.41; 24.30-31; 26.53; II Thessalonians 1.7; I Timothy 5.21; Hebrews 1.7; I Peter 3.21-22; Revelation 16.1.

¹⁵ According to Inta Ivanovska (2011), Augustine himself, while in Cassiciacum, “tried to ‘demythologize’ what might be considered the miraculous aspects of demonic activity in order to safeguard against their claim to divine power and divine knowledge” (64).

Do you understand it, that the Devil has an inherent Power of his own to work Miracles independently on God, and can commit that Power to other Agents? if you do, you must shew me what difference there is betwixt God and the Devil, in respect to Miracles: and how I shall know which of them acts; or if this cannot be shewn, (as I doubt it much) then we must be to seek of what Use Miracles can be; and I think you will find them to be of none at all" (1702:44-45, 48).

Proponents of demonic PK are saddled with the burden of explaining why God would have empowered demons with the ability to perform such power if it is essentially indistinguishable from divine miracles by outside observers. There is no reasonable justification for supposing that Jesus' multiplying bread and fish or Moses' parting of the Red Sea could not be the results of demonic PK; and yet it is difficult, if not blasphemous, to think that demons might actually have accomplished such things.

Now, the classical response has been to say that one can distinguish diabolical acts from divine ones according to whether they advance heresy and/or whether they, by contrast with other extraordinary concurrent acts, exhibit a lesser level of power (Hoadly 1702; Clarke 1728:381). These may be sufficient criteria in some cases, but it cannot be in all cases. For example, miracles that attempt to lay the very foundations of orthodoxy and are enacted in isolation from any other extraordinary act could not be adjudicated on such criteria. For an initial teaching's orthodoxy cannot be the grounds for identifying a singular extraordinary act as a miracle if, at the same time, being a miracle is what constitutes the grounds for why some teaching is orthodox. Prior to future revelations that must accord with foundational ones, and ones that occur with no concurrent opposition of a contrastive power, that Satan and his demons could not perform any extraordinary acts would be the only way miracles can so constitute unambiguous evidence for orthodoxy. No ancient Israelite could affirm some act as a miracle if no opposing act obtains and such an act is toward the advancement of a foundational teaching that has no antecedent. Do we really want to say that any extraordinary power is ambiguous and yet it is the definitive evidence upon which the foundations of Christianity are predicated? This is not right. Nicodemus' response to Jesus' early miracles forestalls any ambiguity that might be associated with these kinds of extraordinary events:

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for *no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him*" (John 3.2; emphasis mine). Nicodemus' expectation, at least, seems to mitigate against demons' being able to perform anything comparable to the kinds of acts (which, at this point, includes a "lesser" miracle a luxury miracle such as the turning of water into wine). This implies that demons are not the kinds of things that can perform even these lesser kinds of miracles.¹⁶ And if miracles are indeed testaments to the works of God, it further leaves us with the uncomfortable implication that such extraordinary occurrences caused by demons are endorsed by God. Aquinas understood this implication well enough: "if the demons whose whole will is diverted to evil, were to receive the power to work miracles, God would vouch for their falsehood, which is repugnant to his goodness" (1259-1268/1933:185).

Therefore, on traditionalism, the creative powers the demons are thought to have seem to be indistinguishable from God's creative powers and, thus, could not serve the purposes they do in substantiating orthodoxy. For these reasons, it seems that we should resist the idea that the demons have such powers. In the next section, I shall consolidate the evidences in formulating a cumulative argument for the improbability of demonic PK.

Why Demons (Probably) do not have PK

I have advanced two independent arguments for supposing that demons do not have the ability to interact with the world as WT's imply they do. First, I argued that the good angels interact with this world strictly as a result of God's causal intervention, not as the result of an intrinsic PK power granted to the angels. If angels do not have such abilities, we should not think that the demons do either. Secondly, I argued that if demons are responsible for the sorts of evils that WT's assume, then they would be capable of extraordinary actions, perhaps even miracles. But this is objectionable since the prospect of a creative power to interact with and manipulate physical forces on a cosmic level seems indistinguishable from divine miracles and, thus, inappropriately attributes divine powers to demons. So, Satan and his minions are probably not responsible for the sorts of evils ascribed to them in WT's.

¹⁶ Someone might point to II Thessalonians 2.9 wherein Satan is said to be able to perform "signs and false wonders." But there is no reason to think that such a description refers to one's ability to perform *genuinely extraordinary events*. One might consider the staged hoaxes of certain nineteenth-century mediums to be "signs and false wonders." But such acts would be no more extraordinary than the showmanship of Penn & Teller.

Though each claim in the previous section may serve to weaken the demonic PK hypothesis on its own, one must consider the claims working together so as to make incredible the notion that demons do not have any sort of PK ability. It is important to stress that the argument I am ultimately advancing is one that mitigates against the probability of WT's being correct descriptions of the origin of (some) natural evil. While it is remotely possible that demons *might* be able to physically interact with the universe and manipulate nature (which is all that is required for the effective logic of a DD), such a notion is, if construed as a serious WT, out of lockstep with the biblical data and offends God's uniqueness as creator and miracle-worker. In effect, we lack any reason to think they have such extraordinary PK abilities, and so WT's are duly challenged.

Let us make the reasoning more perspicuous by considering a comparable scenario. Think of the account of Saul's visit to a medium at Endor as recorded in I Samuel 28. In the account, Samuel's spirit is alleged to be conjured up by the medium at the behest of Saul. But what are we entitled to conclude about Samuel's own abilities in his post-mortem state? I think we should say that, for one, *Samuel did not do this on his own* even though he *might* have. I should say the same of the medium that she is not the one to actually conjure the apparition. We readily conclude that *God* had brought about Samuel's apparition to the medium, if indeed a literal reading of the event is accurate (that Samuel's spirit did arise and speak to the medium and Saul). So, we should not assume without evidence that any created spirit be it angel, demon, or discarnate human has extraordinary powers. And we should certainly not assume, in the face of positive reasons to think otherwise, to think that they do. So, to bring in the arguments from the previous sections, what can we conclude about the specific evidence we have of the demons' powers? First, the fact that the good angels interact with this world as the result of God's causal intervention shows that such interaction is not the result of an intrinsic PK power.

If angels require the assistance of God for even modest interactions with this world (i.e. being visible to a human), then this does not bode well for thinking that demons have PK. Secondly, the prospect of a creative power to alter cosmic and biological conditions entails a power comparable to performing miracles. Yet such power is the preserve of God. If these individual arguments go through, then the notion that the demons are responsible for natural evils brought on by physical transformations or interactions with the forces of nature are diminished. If God's creative provision is the only way to surmount the fact that a nonmaterial being can interact with a physical being, and that no matter-interacting diabolical activity is being provided by God, then the notion of demonic PK is successfully undermined. Therefore, the notion that demons have what it takes to manipulate and/or interact with the physical universe in the way(s) necessary to produce the kinds of natural evils noted by Murray and Boyd is unreasonable. And now I will offer a concluding summary as these arguments are meant to speak to the problem of employing WT's as (partial) explanations of natural evil.

Conclusion: WT's are Implausible

In a WT, one is offering up the notion that Satan and the demons explain a wide array of natural evils (including animal suffering and diseases). Therefore, it is a necessary feature of WT's that they assume that Satan and the demons might have a PK power by which they, as immaterial spirits, can interact with the physical universe. While such is logically conceivable, I have aired a challenge to this. When the evidences defended above are taken together, we have a strong cumulative ground for denying that Satan and the demons, so understood, can interact directly with the physical world in the relevant way.¹⁷ And this implies that WT's, despite being bare possibilities as DD's, are ultimately unsatisfactory.

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¹⁷ Objectors will likely find it difficult to think that I have made my case given that certain biblical passages seem to imply that Satan and the demons have the requisite PK ability. To wit, the Bible reports that Satan allegedly causes atmospheric disasters (Job 1.12-19) and inflicts diseases and maladies in the bodies of people (Job 2.7; Matthew 12.22-28; Luke 13.11-16). The Bible also reports that Satan can enact "false signs and wonders" (II Thessalonians 2.8-9). Space does not permit an analysis of each of these passages, but I submit that none of these episodes implies a PK ability for there are less controversial ways to accommodate the biblical data. And the accommodations I have in mind do not require abandoning the notion that some kind of demonic causation is taking place (Guthrie 2015: 260-82; Guthrie 2018).

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