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## PROBABILISTIC THEISM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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I would like to present an “omnipotence model of a theodicy of chance”, which is, as I believe, compatible with the view called probabilistic theism. I also would like to argue that this model satisfies the criteria of being a good theodicy. By a good theodicy I mean a reasonable and plausible theistic account of evil. I propose that any good theodicy should be: a) comprehensive, b) adequate, c) authentic and d) existentially relevant.

A theodicy is *comprehensive* if it is part of a philosophical theology and it is entailed by its main claims regarding the divine nature and divine action in the world. A comprehensive theodicy should also be well founded in a religious tradition to which its proponents belong. Those who believe in God, believe in God as Christians, Jews or Muslims and not simply as metaphysicians or philosophical theists. Thus, a theodicy shouldn't be only a theory invented to defend the coherence of a philosophical theism.

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A theodicy is *adequate* if it is able to cover facts and data which are accepted by believers and non-believers as well. Empirical data, scientific theories of the physical world, and human aesthetic and moral intuitions are meant by “facts” which are to be covered by an adequate theodicy. A moral sensitivity is at play when we issue moral judgements saying, for example, that an underserved human and animal suffering is a horrendous evil.

A theodicy is *authentic* if it is an expression of reactions and attitudes of individuals to the evils happening in our world.

A theodicy is *existentially relevant*, if it is both a theodicy of *hope* and *protest*. In other words, it is a theodicy which can give us hope when we face horrendous evil and leave room for protest which does not lead us to reconcile ourselves with that evil (Roth, 1981; von Stosch, 2015, p. 204).

Let us now turn to the doctrine of probabilistic theism. The main thesis of probabilistic theism, called also a “theology of chance” is that chance events play an important role in the world and they can be described by some calculations of probabilities (Bartholomew, 1984).

It seems to me that a theistic stance which allows chance to play a role in the world is a new position in the contemporary philosophical theology and that a “theodicy of chance” is a new proposal in present discussions about the problem of evil. I claim that it is a new position, at least if we take into account the long history of the Western natural theology, because it is during the last thirty years when various metaphysical theories have been formulated which adopted the concept of chance as their crucial part.

Since the history of the debate about the problem of evil and the ontology of chance is not our main concern here, I would like to mention only some basic facts regarding relevant historical issues.

The first one is that a traditional (classical) Christian and Muslim theism held the view that all what happens in the world is subjected to a detailed divine control and plan called “special providence”. Thus there is no room for chance events in the world to occur.

The second point is that chance events which the contemporary cosmology, quantum mechanics, biology and history are speaking about were first of all used by proponents of atheism in their arguments against theism. It was J. Monod’s famous claim that chance is an anti-thesis of providence and that the existence of chance disproves the existence of God (Monod, 1970).

The third – a historically interesting fact – is that it was Jewish medieval theistic metaphysicians who accepted chance events in the world and rejected special divine providence. In the *Guide of the perplexed* Maimonides wrote:

I do not by any means believe that this particular leaf has fallen because of a providence watching over it: nor that this spider has devoured this fly because God has now decreed and willed something concerning individuals... For all of this is in my opinion due to *pure chance* (Gellman, 2012, p. 116).

And the fourth circumstance worthy of noting here is that the first efforts during the last century aiming to assimilate chance to theological needs consisted in searching for a room for divine agency at the quantum level of the world (Pollard, 1958). According to William Pollard and his contemporary followers: Robert Russell, Nancy Murphy and Thomas Tracy, God can act in the physical world without violating the laws of nature which he issued for the universe (Tracy, 2015).

One should also keep in mind that there were – apart from physicists – metaphysicians and theologians of process who found room for chance in the universe (Griffin, 1981; Hartshorne, 1984). According to process theologians, divine omnipotence understood as a complete and detailed control over every creature is metaphysically and *essentially* incompatible with divine love. They argued that the essence of love does not consist in a detailed control over the beloved but it does consist in compassion and sharing the same fate with them.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, not everything what happens is subjected to divine omnipotent power and there are events (occasions) lying beyond and outside of God's will and control.<sup>2</sup> Such events are chance events (processes).

Well, I suppose that any further promising discussion of a theodicy of chance should be based on some clarifications of the very notion of chance which is very ambiguous. It seems that the abovementioned process theologians mean by chance, an event which was not intended by God but

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<sup>1</sup> Process theists emphasized that since love is one of the most essential divine attributes it cannot be held that God has a complete and detailed control over the world that he created.

<sup>2</sup> They say that God evoked a process of development in which some creatures might have a bad life (short, painful and so on), but no particular creatures were singled out in advance to have a bad life. The lives of some just turn out that way (Keller, 2007, p. 143).

happened due to uncreated agents possessing power to act (see also van Woudenberg, 2013, p. 36).<sup>3</sup> Apart from this concept of chance (a bit reformulated and defended also later by Peter van Inwagen in 1988), we can mean by chance an event:

which does not have any cause or any causal explanation accessible to science (Jaeger, 2015, p. 153);

or:

an event without purpose (chance<sub>3</sub>), let us call it a “teleological chance” (see also Jaeger, 2015, p.153);

or:

an unpredictable event (chance<sub>4</sub>), let us call it an “epistemological chance”;

or:

an event whose happening was extremely improbable but it happened (chance<sub>5</sub>) (Łukasiewicz, 2015);

or:

an event resulting from a coincidence of two independent causal chains (chance<sub>6</sub>)

or:

an event whose occurrence is equally probable as the occurrence of any other event of a given kind (chance<sub>7</sub>: tossing a coin).

If we take chance<sub>1</sub> and chance<sub>2</sub>, we get an ontological chance<sub>8</sub>: an event which does not have any cause, any causal explanation or simply any explanation at all. Alvin Plantinga has called recently that kind of chance events a “deep chance” (Plantinga, 2013, p. 62; see also Plantinga, 2011).<sup>4</sup> Classic examples of such an event can be radioactive decay of atoms at the

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<sup>3</sup> Proponents of *creatio ex nihilo* should insist that a chancy event is an event which was not intended by God but happened due to created agents possessing power to act.

<sup>4</sup> Such an event can be understood as a spontaneous self-determination made by a given being without any causal contribution of God or any other intentional agents capable to act in the world.

quantum level or random genetic mutations. But many contemporary theists and atheists as well (Monton, 2014) reject an ontological chance (chance<sub>o</sub>) while accepting scientific chance (chance<sub>s</sub>): Jaeger, Murphy, Russell, Tracy and Plantinga. In other words, all these philosophers hold that for every event lacking any scientific explanation there is or can be a supernatural causal explanation and it is or might be God whose action (on the quantum level of the world) is the cause of a given event.

The proponents of divine action at the quantum level have no problems with the *causal closure* of the world because as Lydia Jaeger has recently expressed it: “the world is His world” meaning that God has an unlimited open access to everything what he has created (Jaeger, 2015; see also Harper, 2015 and von Wachter, 2015).<sup>5</sup>

Probabilistic theism, in turn, is a view which accepts an *ontological*, epistemological and teleological chance in the world (Łukasiewicz, 2015). In other words, it is a view claiming that there happen in the world – in which an *unguided* evolution takes place – events lacking any cause or purpose and which are unpredictable even for Laplace’s demon. Contrary to the process theology, probabilistic theists hold the traditional view that God created the world out of nothing and continuously sustains everything in existence (Bartholomew, 2008, p. 205; Heller, 2012). They also share the view – like the process theologians and open theists do – that God had no detailed plan for the created world, which means, for example, that the Holocaust was not planned and not willed by God. Such a view seems to provide a metaphysical basis for an adequate theodicy because it resorts to the contemporary science including cosmology, physics, biology and history.

However, even if everything in the above scenario is convincing or at least is not incoherent, then there remains the problem of evil and suffering in the probabilistic world.<sup>6</sup> All sensitive beings are put at risk to experience *undeserved* physical pain and spiritual suffering in the world of chance and

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel von Wachter claims that God does not need to act at the quantum level. He can intervene as often as he wills but as von Wachter says he does not intervene very visibly at least today in our part of the world (von Wachter, 2015, p. 55). Von Wachter’s conception of miracles, divine intervention, and the laws of nature seems to be very interesting and original.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, much more must be said than it was said above to make clear many points regarding divine nature.

random evolution. And there is enormous pain and suffering in the universe, which seems to be undeserved and pointless.

How could it be that an omnipotent and morally perfect being allows sentient beings to exist in the world of chance. Only a God who has everything under his divine control is morally justified in creating and sustaining the world containing seemingly pointless and horrendous evils. But in answer to the last question a proponent of a theodicy of chance can just ask another question in return: how could it be that an omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect being created, according to his *eternal and detailed plan*, all sentient beings having allowed them to suffer?

In order to have more devices in evaluating a theodicy of chance, I suggest to use two additional concepts: “a theodicy of limits” and “a theodicy of will” (“voluntarist theodicy”). A theodicy of limits is every theodicy which claims that God *essentially* cannot do something because of some metaphysical or logical reasons constraining him. God could not create some other world than he did because, for example, if he willed creatures capable of loving him freely to exist, God had to create the world by an *unguided* evolution based on random mutations and the process of natural selection. (Zamulinski, 2010, p. 207). Or to take another example, God could not create a world in which he could intervene, because there is a metaphysical gap between him as a transcendent primary cause and the created secondary causes (Schärfl, 2009, p. 147) or – as agatheists claim – because his moral perfection makes metaphysically impossible for him to intervene in the world (Salamon, 2015).

A theodicy of will is every theodicy which claims that God *could* have acted otherwise than he acted but he *didn't will* to act otherwise than he acted. God could have created a world with creatures able to love him freely without evolution, be it guided or unguided, but he *didn't will* to do it. God could have created a world in which he might intervene and, in fact, he created such a world, but he *doesn't will* to intervene, or, to be more precise, *he doesn't will* to intervene always or “too often” in the created order of things.

Probabilistic theism is a view which claims that God doesn't will to intervene too often or that he *never wills* to intervene in the created order of things because the world created by God is able to develop itself and any special divine action would be incompatible with divine majesty and

perfection (Bartholomew, 2008; Schärfl, 2009; 145).<sup>7</sup> Probabilistic theists admit that God is continuously acting on the level of the human mind and if there are any other minds in the created world, he is acting on those minds as well. This divine continuous action manifests divine care about every sensitive being in the universe. This divine action is however very delicate and subtle, untainted by any physical or metaphysical “compulsion”. It is discreet fellowship and participation in all of our joys and sorrows (Schärfl, 2009, p. 150). Perhaps it is sometimes inspiring illumination which opens to us some unknown moral or intellectual possibilities and horizons (Salamon, 2015). Acting in such a way God is involved in the existence and fate of every being which really needs divine involvement and is able to respond to it. Acting in such a way God can directly and intimately influence individuals, groups, and the whole humankind or even all existing species (by influencing the most developed species, whose behavior determines the rest of the creation or at least a part of it). The Creator can do all these things without continuous control and determination of everything and everyone. Agatheists call such a divine action in the world “providence from within” (Salamon, 2015).

In regard to the problem of evil, any theodicy of limits will claim that God is justified in creating a world containing horrifying evils because he *cannot* prevent such evils. The reason why he *cannot* prevent evils from happening is that he *cannot* intervene in the world (Salamon, 2015; Schärfl, 2015, p. 89).

Any theodicy of will, in turn, will claim that God is justified in creating a world containing pointless evils. The reason why God is justified in doing

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<sup>7</sup> The emergence of life in the universe is “almost” inevitable because the universe is large and old enough, and a biochemical mechanism is very effective. The emergence of sentient beings was also almost inevitable because of longstanding and countless mutations and adaptations of living organisms to their environment. All these were very probable and hence in a sense necessary (inevitable). The great advantage of the indeterministic world is its own creativity, which is possible because of the chance events happening in a way restricted only by the laws of nature. Thus, if one evolutionary path fails another one is open. Perhaps a mutation suitable for the growth and development of a given species happened by chance and enabled it to survive in hard conditions and further to develop. Elasticity and redundancy are very typical for the world of chance but because of these properties this world encompasses a large number of possibilities and abilities to develop and regenerate after various natural catastrophes (Łukasiewicz, 2015).

this is that there are some greater goods which he wanted to achieve in the world.

It seems to me that a theodicy of will can cover “the free will defense” and “a soul-making theodicy”. I’m also convinced that it was possible for God to have a significant human freedom without Auschwitz and it was possible for God to have a significant human spiritual development without at least some pointless animal suffering.

Why, then, all these happen? The answer might be that God *willed* them to happen. God willed them to happen perhaps because he willed to achieve some greater good simply *out of the worst evils* or because of other reasons unknown to us as a skeptical theism claims. Or perhaps, as I would prefer to think, God may have willed to say: Do not worry and trust me; I can really do everything. I can create everything out of nothing and I did it and I can purify, remove and transform even the worst evils. True, *I did not decree* them to happen but they happened because I gave all creatures such a great freedom and independence that they could perform even the worst evils and *they did it*. But I am the Lord of everything and I will show you that I can redeem even the worst evils. All will be well in the end.

There are of course objections which can and *should* be raised against both kinds of theodicies. One may object to a theodicy of limits that God should not have created any world at all since it was not within his power to prevent evil from happening. One may object to a theodicy of will that if God could have prevented the worst evils and he failed to do it because he didn’t will to prevent the evils, then he is not a good God or a “wholly good God” but he is a “God of destruction” (von Stochs, 2015, p. 203; Schärfl, 2015, p. 87).<sup>8</sup>

Last but not least, a theodicy of limits gives us no rational *hope* for liberation from the evils of our world because if God could not prevent the evils which already happened, there is no reasonable *hope* that he will be able to do that in the future or in the eternity.

A theodicy of will gives us no reasonable hope for liberation from all suffering and evil because if God allowed them to happen while having

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of questioning of divine goodness has been recently mentioned by Bishop and Perszyk (2011) but it was clearly spelled out by Roth already in 1981 in his theodicy of protest. This idea has also its legitimation in Judaism where a dark side in God’s nature finds some scriptural support.



power to prevent them from happening, then there is no reasonable hope that God will wish to redeem or transform them in the future or in the eternity.

Surely, a theodicy of limits and a theodicy of will leave us room to *protest* against God. A theodicy of divine limits leaves us room to *protest* against God because he could have refrained from creating our world but he didn't do that. A theodicy of will allows for *protest* against God because he *could* have prevented all evils (or some of them) but he didn't prevent them.

In my view, probabilistic theism is compatible with a theodicy of will even if we assume the doctrine of a very strong divine omnipotence meaning that God can do everything that he wills.<sup>9</sup> The doctrine of a very strong divine omnipotence can be exposed in terms of divine power over modalities. Johann Heidegger (1633–1698) spelled out the idea of divine power over modalities by saying that:

The object of divine power is the possible, not in itself, as though there were anything outside God which has the cause of its possibility in itself; outside the power and will of God; but in the power and will of God, which alone is the foundation and root of all possibility (Higfield, 2011, p. 116).

In other words, God is bound only by his will (Roth, 1981, p. 16). I think that there is a reason to believe that such a very strong concept of divine omnipotence is deeply rooted in the Christian religious tradition.<sup>10</sup> If God created everything out of nothing, sustains all the universe, became a man and raised Jesus from the dead, then, one can believe, that nothing is impossible for him including the overcoming the worst evils and even changing the past. We may call this concept of divine omnipotence “a folk notion of divine omnipotence” and say after Alvin Goldman – a bit changing his famous statement about folk epistemology – that:

Whatever else philosophy of religion might proceed to do, it should at least have its roots in the concepts and practices of the folk. If these roots

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<sup>9</sup> I suggest to make a distinction between strong divine omnipotence and a very strong divine omnipotence. Strong divine omnipotence would consist in the claim that God can bring about any logically possible state of affairs. A very strong divine omnipotence would consist in the claim that God can bring about any state of affairs which he wills it to obtain.

<sup>10</sup> It is also typical for Jewish and Muslim theology.

are utterly rejected and abandoned, by what rights would this discipline call itself ‘philosophy of religion’ at all?

Surely, I agree that even if God created the world out of nothing, sustains everything in existence, can intervene and intervened in the world, can change the past and redeem all the worst evils, then all these does not entail that he can do simply everything without any limitation and that the only limitation to his power is his will. But on the other hand, if he can do all these things, then he has enough power to do what “first order believers” believe in (miracles).

Anyway, given divine omnipotence we can respond to the objections raised against a theodicy of will and a theodicy of chance in particular, as follows.

To avoid a “God of destruction” objection we may say that, an omnipotent God can make true both following propositions:

(1) God is perfect and wholly good

and

(2) God could have created a better world than he created (without Auschwitz) but he *didn't will* to do that.

To avoid a threat of occasionalism, we may say that God can also make true the three following propositions:

(3) God continuously sustains every contingent being in existence

(4) The world created by God “makes itself”

and

(5) There happen chance events in the world: an ontological and teleological chance included.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, an omnipotent God can *transform* all suffering (human and animal pointless suffering included) and make it possible that *all* victims and sufferers will be definitely liberated from all evils forever. Briefly, only an omnipotent God can give us hope *and* only against such a God our protest can be raised.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion, we may say that an omnipotence model of a theodicy of chance fulfils, to some extent at least, all criteria, proposed at the beginning of the text.

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<sup>11</sup> It should be done to avoid the threat of occasionalism which can be entailed by continuous creation (Göcke, 2015, p. 25).

<sup>12</sup> In other words, I would prefer more a theodicy than an “anthropodicy”.

Such a model of theodicy is *comprehensive* because it is rooted in a metaphysics of God (a theory of divine action in the world included) and is compatible with the Christian religious tradition which claims both that God has an unlimited power *and* that God is wholly good.

Such a model of theodicy is *adequate* because it is compatible with the contemporary science and our moral intuitions. It is compatible with the contemporary science because it assumes an *unguided evolution* and quantum indeterminism. It is compatible with our moral sensitivity because it takes abundant animal and human suffering as *undeserved* and pointless. A theodicy of chance does not try to find any possible reason why a particular pointless evil has been permitted by God.

Such a model of theodicy is *authentic* because it brings into expression individual needs of those people who facing, on the one hand, all the suffering in the world, and an enormous size and beauty of the universe, on the other, still believe in the existence of an omnipotent God.

Such a model of theodicy is existentially relevant because we can address our *protest* to an omnipotent God who could have prevented all undeserved sufferings but he did refrain from preventing them. And still we *hope* that only an omnipotent God can redeem all evil and that all will be all right in the end. We hope that he can do all these things and we hope that he *will* do that because he is a wholly good and morally perfect God.

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### Summary

I would like to present in the article an “omnipotence model of a theodicy of chance”, which is, as I believe, compatible with the view called probabilistic theism. I also would like to argue that this model satisfies the criteria of being a good theodicy. By a good theodicy I mean a reasonable and plausible theistic account of evil. A good theodicy should be: a) comprehensive, b) adequate, c) authentic and d) existentially relevant.