

Why do we Suffer? Buddhism and the Problem of Evil

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Abstract

This paper explains the Buddhist concept of suffering (*dukkha*) and its relation to the Christian problem of evil. Although there is no problem of evil in Buddhism, the Buddhist understanding of the origin and causes of suffering will help us to find new approaches to the problem of evil. More specifically, I argue (1) that the concept of evil can be interpreted in terms of *dukkha*; (2) that the existence of suffering or *dukkha* is necessarily inevitable for finite beings, given the metaphysical structure of the world and ourselves; and (3) that this reasoning can be interpreted as a defense against the problem of evil.

1. Preliminary Remarks

The title of this paper may seem a little surprising: why should Buddhism be concerned with the problem of evil? After all, the problem of evil is the problem of how to reconcile the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God with the presence of evil in the world. But such a problem simply does not exist in Buddhism. The reason why there is no such problem is that Buddhism denies the existence of a being comparable to the Christian God. Now, to be sure, Buddhism is not really an atheist religion. The traditional Indian Buddhist conception of the universe comprises six realms of being, one of which is the realm of gods. But though these gods enjoy an exceptionally happy life and will live for a very long time (millions of years),¹ they are not immortal and are still part of the cycle of rebirths. Their happiness results from good *karma* accumulated in earlier lives, but once these karmic benefits are consumed, they will die and be reborn like everyone else. So although there are gods in Buddhism (or at least in most Buddhist traditions), these gods are part of the world (in the broadest sense of the word). They do not transcend it; they are still subject to its laws. And, most importantly, they are not creators of this world. They cannot be held responsible for the existence of evil in the world, because the world is not their creation. So there cannot be something like the problem of evil in Buddhism, just because nobody is ultimately responsible for its existence.

But then what has Buddhism got to do with the problem of evil? The answer is that both are concerned with the problem of suffering. Buddhism and Christianity both try to explain why there is suffering in the world, although their explanations are quite different. The idea of this paper is to build a bridge between these two explanations. I will give an account of the Buddhist conception of the origin and nature of suffering and then connect this to the Christian problem of evil. I will also sketch something that might be called a 'Buddhist solution' to the problem of evil, which means an attempt to take the Buddhist reasoning from its native intellectual tradition and to apply it to the problem of evil. My tacit assumption is that Buddhist philosophy should primarily be regarded as a kind of philosophy, and insofar as it is philosophy, it may have some valuable insights to offer even to those who are not Buddhists themselves. So I am not trying to reconcile or compare Buddhist and Christian ideas. Rather, I am trying to find a link between two intellectual traditions in order to see if bringing them together might help us develop a new approach to an old problem.

I will focus on developing one of the core contentions of Buddhism, namely that all life involves suffering, or, to use the Pali word: that all life involves *dukkha*.² The basic idea is this: *if it is true that all life necessarily involves suffering (as Buddhist philosophers claim), then it is not possible that God could have created a world in which there is life but no suffering*. I will explain the term *dukkha* and show how it relates to the Western terms in the debate, evil and suffering. Then, I will outline the traditional Buddhist reasoning to support the claim that all things are *dukkha*. This implies that *dukkha* or suffering is in a strong sense inevitable and that it is impossible that there is a world with living beings but no suffering. Finally, I will show how this reasoning can be interpreted as a defense against the problem of evil.

2. *Dukkha, Suffering, Evil*

Shortly after his enlightenment and after deciding to teach his insights, the Buddha gave his first sermon to a small group of ascetics. This sermon contains the core of all Buddhist teachings, most notably the so-called four noble truths: four statements expressing the insight into the fundamental nature of the universe the Buddha had gained. The first of these is that all things are tainted with suffering and this is the contention I will first analyze. Here is a typical statement:

Now this, *bhikkhus*, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering. (*Samyutta Nikaya* 56, 11, p. 1844)

The key term in this passage which is translated as ‘suffering’ is *dukkha*. But what exactly is meant by *dukkha*? Virtually all commentators agree that to translate *dukkha* as suffering is at least partly misleading,³ for suffering is usually understood as a state of intense pain or distress, not just any unpleasant feeling. If, e.g. I take a walk in the forest, not really paying attention to the path, and then accidentally a twig scratches my cheek, it would be quite ridiculous to call this an instance of suffering. But although we would hesitate to call it suffering, we might well call it *dukkha*, because this term has a much broader meaning.

A look at the instances of *dukkha* mentioned in the text might help to explain this. There we can distinguish three groups of phenomena which are said to be *dukkha*. The first group is physical phenomena such as illness, birth, and death. This is suffering in the form of immediate, physical pain arising mostly from natural defects of the human body. The second group is what could be called mental phenomena which are comprised under the heading ‘union with what is displeasing, separation from what is pleasing’. This surely refers not to the state of union or separation itself but to the negative emotions which result from these states. So we may understand this as all suffering which manifests itself in emotional distress rather than physical pain. The third group is the philosophically most interesting; it is the fact that ‘the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering’. In Buddhism, the five aggregates are the ontological elements which constitute every person. So this kind of suffering is the suffering that arises from the mere fact of being a conditioned, finite being, and can therefore justly be called metaphysical. As this example shows, the term *dukkha* comprises physical, mental, and metaphysical aspects. (Michaels 2011: 61) So *dukkha* is universal in the sense that it is to be found on all planes of existence.

But *dukkha* exceeds the meaning of ‘suffering’ not only in extension but also in intension in that it comprises all degrees of unpleasantness. From the slightest nuisance to the most horrible pain, everything is *dukkha*.⁴ So we could equally translate *dukkha* as unsatisfactoriness, as

frustration, or disappointment. If we should find a formula to sum up all these different aspects, it could be: 'something is *dukkha* if we would like it to be otherwise' or 'if it fails to achieve our ideal of happiness, perfection or wellbeing' or even more simply '*dukkha* is what is not as good as it should be'.

So much for the Buddhist terminology. We should now take a look at the other side, at the notion of evil as used in 'the problem of evil'. Here again, we must be cautious, for usually when we speak of evil, we do not mean exactly the same thing as when we talk about the problem of evil. 'Evil' is first and foremost an ethical term, which denotes an extremely wrong moral act. As Marcus Singer puts it, 'evil acts are acts that are horrendously wrong, that cause immense suffering, and are done from an evil motive'. (Singer 2004: 193) This is no doubt part of what is meant in the problem of evil, but this meaning is yet too narrow.⁵ For the evils we think of when discussing the problem of evil are not just acts (or moral evils) but also events (or physical evils) such as diseases, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Interestingly, philosophers of religion have never wasted much time on explaining what they mean by the term 'evil' but have rather straightforwardly tackled the question of why God should or should not allow these evils.⁶ But then again, the answer is quite simple: something is an evil if and only if it is actually or possibly the cause of suffering. There is no way something can be an evil if it does not or cannot conceivably cause suffering. Actual or potential suffering is a necessary condition for something to be evil: if something does not and cannot ever cause any suffering, what could be evil about it?⁷ But it is also a sufficient condition: whatever involves suffering is an evil. Of course, there are instances of suffering which serve some higher good, e.g. the pain resulting from a life-saving operation. But these are nevertheless evils, things which are bad and undesirable in themselves. We may accept the pain, because it's the only way to achieve a goal that is important to us but that does not make the pain itself something good. If there were a way to achieve this goal without the pain, then we would do that.⁸ We may sometimes accept evils to achieve some higher purpose but that doesn't stop them from being evils. So evil *is* suffering, and suffering *is* evil, and in conclusion, it seems fair to say that the problem of evil is the problem of suffering.

But what is meant by suffering? This is the place to link the two terms: suffering can be understood in terms of *dukkha*, that is, as pain, disappointment, displeasure, as failure to achieve the ideal of being good. The Buddhist concept of *dukkha* expresses this aspect of the Christian notion of evil quite well⁹ – instead of calling it the problem of evil, we might as well call it the problem of *dukkha*, i.e.: the problem of why an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God created a world which fails to achieve our ideal of goodness. So from now on, after having made enough cautious remarks, I will use the terms '*dukkha*', 'suffering', and 'evil' interchangeably as denoting the same concept.

We can now rephrase the original question: 'if there is an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good God, why is there suffering/*dukkha* in the world?' And Buddhism has given a quite convincing answer to the second part of this question.

3. The Origin and Inevitability of Suffering

We now understand the meaning of *dukkha* and the contention that all life involves suffering. But why should this be true? The classical Buddhist answer to this question can be found in the following argument:

- (1) If there is craving for something impermanent, then there is *dukkha*.
- (2) The world is necessarily impermanent.
- (3) Life necessarily involves craving.
- (4) Life in the world necessarily involves *dukkha*.

Let's go through the premises.

(1) If there is craving for something impermanent, then there is *dukkha*. To understand the reasoning behind this, we must first understand how suffering and craving are connected. This is the subject of the second noble truth. It says:

Now this, *bhikkus*, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination. (*Samyutta Nikaya* 56, 11, p. 1844)

So the Buddha's answer to the question of suffering is that it arises from craving; it is a result of our various desires. The word translated as 'craving' in this passage in the original is *tanha*, which literally means 'thirst' and denotes not just any desire but a strong, unquenchable thirst that can never be fully satisfied.¹⁰ This may sound familiar, for there is a strong current in Western philosophy which also emphasizes that sensual desires are a source of suffering and should be controlled, but the Buddha's contention is more radical: according to him, it doesn't matter what we crave for – there is no distinction between good and bad desires. The objects of our desires are negligible – the mere fact that we desire something, whatever it may be, will cause suffering. So craving for great virtue or intellectual insight is as dangerous as craving for food and sex.

But why does craving cause suffering? Surely, if I work hard to get the job I always wanted, and then don't get it, this will cause me suffering or disappointment. But if I get it, why should that be a cause of suffering? It seems as if desires themselves are not the problem but rather the fact that the world refuses to fulfill these desires. How could there be suffering in a world in which all our desires are fulfilled? The Buddhist answer is that the idea of such a world is inconsistent. To understand why, we should look at another aspect of the classical analysis of suffering in Buddhism, the so-called three types of *dukkha*: 'there are three types of suffering: suffering which is suffering in and of itself, suffering through the fact of being conditioned, and suffering which is change or transformation.' (*Abhidharmakosabhāṣyam*, III, 899)¹¹ The first type is the most obvious: suffering in itself, i.e. suffering from things which are unpleasant in themselves, such as physical pain or emotional grief.¹² But this is not the only kind of suffering there is, for there is another type, suffering from change. This is suffering that arises from the fact that even our most pleasant experiences and most joyful moments must ultimately pass. Though there are moments of pleasure in life, these moments won't last: we may finally have what we always wanted, but then we lose it, or it starts to bore us, or we become sick and cannot enjoy it anymore – it is a fact of life that the good things aren't forever. And however good our lives are, death will ultimately end everything that is good about them, and there is no way to avoid this. It is this fact that explains why even pleasure is *dukkha*: because it will inevitably be over and lead to disappointment, the feeling that things are somehow not as they should be, and to the desire for change. Being happy may not in itself be suffering, but it will cause suffering by being impermanent.¹³ It is this impermanence (*anicca*) that explains how suffering arises from craving: when we want something, we want it to last. We hold on to it, we cling to it, we don't want to let it go, and we believe that once we permanently have what we want, we will be satisfied. This belief is grounded in the false assumption that there are things to which we can hold on. But if these things are not lasting and will always be subject to change, our desire for them can never be satisfied. So there cannot be a world in which all our desires are fulfilled because that would presuppose a world that does not change. And therefore, our craving for something impermanent will inevitably lead to suffering, which is precisely what premise (1) states.

Let's move on to premise (2): the world is necessarily impermanent. Even if we accept that clinging to something impermanent will in the end lead to suffering, we still might argue that

this is only a reason to choose carefully the things we crave for. Suffering could still be avoided by wisely regulating your desires. Premise (2) says that this is impossible. But why must the world be impermanent? Couldn't there be a world that is stable and that allows for the possibility that our desires are ultimately fulfilled? The Buddhist answer is no, and the reason for that takes us to the third type of suffering: suffering by being conditioned.¹⁴ What does that mean? According to Buddhism, everything that exists is conditioned, i.e. its existence depends on other things. The most important example is the human person. A person consists of the so-called five aggregates (*khandhas*): body, sensation, cognition, volition, and consciousness.¹⁵ The person just is the connection of these five aggregates, they are the necessary conditions for her existence, and there is no person beyond them. If the five aggregates dissolve, the person will dissolve, too. But the five aggregates themselves are also conditioned and exist only in dependence on other things. For example, the body I currently have contingently depends on what I eat, how I watch my health and how much exercise I get, and the sensations I have depend on my surroundings, my past experiences, and my expectations... So what makes up the person constantly changes: we grow old; we have different opinions on the same matter now than a week before. We don't want the same things we wanted when we were children etc. A person (and for that matter, any other object, too) is therefore in constant change, which is why in fact there is no person. It is merely a continuously fluctuating nexus of various factors. (This is the well-known Buddhist idea of *anatta* or no-self.) If we want to express this in western categories, the best way is probably to say that Buddhism maintains a process ontology¹⁶ according to which the fundamental elements of reality are causally interconnected processes. This also rules out that there are any persistent substances, ontological atoms that make up the building blocks of reality around which the processes group. Things, just like a whirlwind, are empty; they have no substance or core. And that is the justification of the second premise: everything that exists is a process depending on other processes, which is why all things are inevitably impermanent and which is also why they are inevitably involved in suffering. We now have a straightforward connection between what are referred to as the three marks of existence (*tilakkhana*): suffering, impermanence, and non-self (*dukkha*, *anicca*, and *anatta*): everything is involved in suffering because everything is impermanent and everything is impermanent because it has no substance or self.¹⁷

If we now connect this analysis of suffering, impermanence, and non-self to craving, the result is that craving causes suffering because in craving we try to attach ourselves to something not knowing that this is impossible because neither the object nor we ourselves are persistent entities so that all our craving will always be in vain. To put it simply, suffering arises because we want something we cannot have. And what we want and cannot have is such that it is essentially impossible for us to ever attain it. The way the world is, it's just impossible for any being to finally really get what she wants.¹⁸

Now, before we proceed to the third premise, we should ask whether this analysis is actually true: is really all suffering the result of craving? For example, what about an earthquake – how does craving enter the picture here? The answer is no physical event alone and in itself is a cause of suffering. In a purely physical world without conscious beings, there will be no suffering. What causes suffering in our example is not the earthquake itself (after all, it's just moving ground) but the fact that we don't want it to happen, to harm us and the ones we love, to destroy our possessions. Suffering results from our reaction to the earthquake, and then, it involves our desires.¹⁹

But is there no such thing as simple, basic suffering, such as physical pain? If the earthquake buries me under the ruins of my house, breaking my bones, and squashing my limbs, isn't this pain a case of suffering without craving? No. We must distinguish between pain and suffering.²⁰ Pain in itself is not suffering but just a certain kind of sensation. What makes us suffer from pain is the fact that we don't want to be in pain. Of course, in most cases, the sensation of pain is such

that we want to avoid it, and this is our most natural reaction to pain. But it is by no means necessary (although in most cases our reaction is certainly not up to us). If a person wants to be in pain (as, e.g. a masochist), then being in pain will not cause this person to suffer (and likewise, sensations which are usually pleasant can become a cause of suffering if we strongly reject them). Unlike pain, suffering is a matter of attitude and depends on our reaction toward our sensations.

Now for premise (3): life necessarily involves craving. This is actually not 100% correct, at least from the Buddhist perspective. In fact, the third premise in Buddhist terms should be read as 'life of *unenlightened* beings necessarily involves craving'. For the Buddhist, craving is the natural state of all beings, but it can be overcome, which is precisely the way to salvation (this is what the third and fourth noble truth proclaim). But insofar as we are concerned with a theoretical solution to the problem of evil and not with a practical means of overcoming evil, we can at this point part way with the Buddhist and argue from the perspective of the *unenlightened*.²¹ So why is craving, from this point of view, necessary?

There is a simple, anthropological answer, which doesn't even presuppose a Buddhist point of view, although it is perfectly compatible with Buddhism. Why do we have desires? Most naturally, because we lack something. A desire presupposes a deficit: if someone has a desire, it is necessary that they are in a deficient and unsatisfactory state and regard a change to another state without this deficit as better. But because we are finite beings, we will always and with necessity lack something and therefore cannot help but have desires. From the Buddhist perspective, we could express this thought by saying that we are finite insofar as we are conditioned beings and being conditioned we will always be in need of something else to sustain our existence. Only if we are free from all conditions and dependencies can we be free from desires (which is why freeing ourselves from craving leads to the state of unconditionedness or *nibbana*). Our desires are ultimately rooted in our human finitude. So all finite beings will, as a result of their finitude, have desires. In parenthesis, that is also the reason why most church fathers have defended the idea that God has no desires²²: being infinite, he lacks nothing and is completely self-sufficient; therefore, he cannot have any desires.

By now, it should be clear why Buddhism maintains that (unenlightened) life necessarily involves suffering or *dukkha*, and by necessarily I mean: given the metaphysical structure of the world and the anthropological structure of human beings, it is impossible to avoid suffering. 'Life involves suffering' is an analytic proposition. Now, we must apply this to the problem of evil.

4. *A Defense from the Inevitability of Suffering*

Given that suffering is inevitable, we could construct something like the following argument:

- (1) Life necessarily involves suffering.
- (2) Therefore, it is not possible that there are living beings that are not involved in suffering.
- (3) Therefore, it is not possible that any being could create a world in which there are living beings that are not involved in suffering.

The propositions need little clarification. We have discussed the first premise at length, and I think it is fair to say that given our analysis of the concepts of suffering and desire, we can regard this as well established. The second proposition is barely more than a paraphrase of the first proposition, replacing the logically unpractical concept-term 'life' with a more handy 'living beings'. And the third proposition is just an application of the rule that if *p* is logically impossible it is also impossible that anyone can bring it about that *p*. This also holds for an omnipotent being, because omnipotence only includes the ability to bring about the logically possible.²³

But is this a convincing solution? Let's first see how this argument works with the distinction between the logical and the evidential problem.²⁴ If it works, it surely solves the logical problem. Not by stating that it is possible that there are reasons to bring about evils (like higher-order good defenses do) but by going even further and declaring that a world without evils is contradictory. Asking why God didn't create a world without suffering is like asking why God didn't create triangles with four corners. But couldn't God prevent the occurrence of evil? Admittedly, though he cannot prevent the fact that there is evil at all (which is the logical problem), he could probably prevent at least some evils (which is the evidential problem). So he could miraculously cure a child from leukemia, although he could not bring it about that the child will never suffer. In fact, for any evil, it is possible that God prevent it from happening, but it is still impossible that God could prevent all evils from happening. This may sound paradoxical, but it is no different from saying that for any number it is possible to name a number which is greater than the first one but that it's still impossible to name a number which is greater than all numbers.

But even if we admit that God could never eliminate all suffering, couldn't he bring it about that we suffer less? This is a strong objection and I admit that probably the Buddhist defense alone will not help us to find an answer to it. The argument by itself, without additional support, will not be able to provide a convincing answer to the evidential problem (with respect to this, it fares no better than any other defense).²⁵ But then again, the importance of the Buddhist defense lies rather in the different way of approaching the whole phenomenon of evil and in opening up the possibility of a perspectival change than in a final solution of the problem of evil.

This perspectival change means abandoning the question of what the point of evil is, because there need not be an answer to it. Higher-order goods defenses regard evils as conditionally necessary, i.e. necessary under the condition that this higher good shall be achieved. If you want virtues like bravery and compassion, then you have to accept the suffering that is necessary to achieve them. So evil is justified. But the Buddhist defense regards evils as necessary *simpliciter*. Therefore, we don't have to look for reasons for a particular instance of evil; there is no need to justify it. Evil is inevitable – it is necessary, but not necessary for something. Given the meta-physical structure of the world, there cannot be no evils. Evil is just there and it cannot not be there. It's nobody's fault – not even God's.

If we accept this, we can go one step further and admit that even the existence of pointless evil is compatible with the existence of God. When we try to justify the existence of evil, we try to find the point of it. But this approach is never really satisfying, for even if we can convince ourselves that God has a reason to allow evil to happen, the problem remains that someone who inflicts evil on others even for a good reason stands in need of atonement and forgiveness (as D. Z. Phillips famously said²⁶). But if we accept the inevitability of evil following the Buddhist defense, then we can accept that some evil is pointless. Even if there is a God, there can be pointless evils. And even if each and every instance of evil in the world were completely pointless, this would still not be a disproof of the existence of God.²⁷ This acceptance of the pointlessness of evil is what can be gained from the Buddhist solution and what might possibly open up new ways of approaching the problem of evil.

Short Biography

Sebastian Gäb is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Trier (Germany). His main area of research is philosophy of religion, especially the problems of religious realism and religious language, which are the subject of his recent book *Wahrheit, Bedeutung und Glaube [Truth, Meaning and Faith]* (Münster 2014). He also works in philosophy of language, currently writing a study on ineffability, and Chinese and Buddhist philosophy.

Notes

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¹ See Harvey (2013: 36) for exact numbers.

² Sometimes, it is said that Buddhism believes that all life is suffering. But putting it this way easily leads to a misunderstanding of Buddhism as pessimistic and world – weary. Buddhism (at least most of its schools) doesn't deny that the positive aspects of life are real – they just don't outweigh the suffering. 'Buddhism then does not say that "life is suffering," as the first Ennobling Reality is sometimes glossed, but that pain and suffering are an endemic part of life that must be calmly and fully acknowledged in one's response to the nature of conditioned existence' (Harvey 2007: 323 see also *Abhidhammakosabhaysam*, III: 902 ff).

³ Harvey 2013: 53; Peacock 2008: 209f; Gowans 2003: 120f.; Kalupahana 1992: 87f.; Rahula 1974: 17.

⁴ Cf. Teasdale/Chaskalson (2011: 90).

⁵ Likewise, Calder (2013) distinguishes between the same two meanings as broad and narrow concepts of evil.

⁶ An exception is van Inwagen who in van Inwagen (1991: 135) says that evil can be identified with 'undeserved pain and suffering'.

⁷ Of course, it could be evil in the sense of being morally wrong (such as stealing some money nobody knows of from a deceased person who had neither friends nor relatives). But this is not the sense in which we use the term when discussing the problem of evil – if all the evils in the world were just cases of victimless crimes, we wouldn't have a reason to question God's benevolence.

⁸ William Rowe rightly says: 'we must not confuse the intense suffering in and of itself with the good things to which it sometimes leads or of which it may be a necessary part' (Rowe 1979: 335).

⁹ Of course, only insofar as 'evil' in 'the problem of evil' is concerned. When we speak of evil in terms of moral evil, of sin, things change: this aspect is clearly not covered by *dukkha* and is treated differently in Buddhism. See Shim (2001: 10ff.) and Southwold (1985) for details.

¹⁰ See Gowans (2003: 128) and Gethin (1998: 69ff).

¹¹ See also Siderits (2007: 19ff.) and Gethin (1998: 61f).

¹² Note that this, too, is suffering from craving so that there is no contradiction between the theory of the three types and the second noble truth (cf. *Abhidhammakosabhaysam*, III: 908). Things which are *dukkha* in themselves are such that due to their very nature, we want to avoid them and crave for their non-being.

¹³ Cf. *Abhidhammakosabhaysam*, III: 901f.

¹⁴ Herman (1996) vigorously argues that premise (2) is false but, in my view, neglects the importance of distinguishing different kinds of suffering.

¹⁵ See Gowans (2003: 33ff.) and Siderits (2007: 32ff.) for more details. See also the classical dialogue between Nagasena and Milinda in the *Milindapanha* II, 1,1, p. 40ff.

¹⁶ This idea is developed at length in Gowans (2003: ch. 6).

¹⁷ This is reflected in the verses of the *Dhammapada*: 'all conditioned things are impermanent (*anicca*) [...] all conditioned things are unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) [...] all things are not-self (*anatta*)' (*Dhammapada* 277–279). Other possible readings of this formula are discussed in Laumakis (2008: 130f.) and Herman (1996: 160). See also *Vissuddhimagga*:518.

¹⁸ There is another possible but less forceful justification for this premise which does not rest on Buddhist presuppositions: if we are dealing with psychologically more complex beings or if more than one being is concerned, it is highly probable that there will be conflicting desires, either among different beings or within one being itself. I want a beefsteak, the cow wants to live. We can't have it both. I want to take a nap in the sun and I want to get on with my work, too. You literally can't have the cake and eat it. It is logically impossible that in a world like ours (though not in any world), all of everyone's desires could be fulfilled.

¹⁹ As Ninian Smart puts it: 'all this implies that the Buddhist explanation of the continuance of illfare, suffering, *dukkha*, is to do not strictly with outer material forces, but with the general state of a person's consciousness'. (Smart 1984: 374)

²⁰ For a discussion of this claim, see Pitcher (1970) (contra) and Hall (1989) (pro).

²¹ Following the way would lead to the falsity of the conclusion (4): life does not necessarily involve suffering because enlightenment can free us from it. Of course, enlightenment radically alters life and the state of *nibbana* which we attain then is not really comparable to life; but if we accept this as a kind of life, then the inference fails on the falsity of premise (3).

²² For example, Clement in his *Stromata* IV, 23, 151.

²³ The locus classicus for this is Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* Ia, q. 25, a4.

²⁴ The logical problem of evil is the view that the propositions 'there is a God' and 'there is evil in the world' are logically inconsistent (they cannot both be true). The evidential problem is the view that although the two propositions are logically compatible, the presence of evil is strong evidence against the existence of God.

²⁵ A strategy to deal with this objection would be to show that the total amount of suffering cannot be decreased by preventing some particular instance of suffering so that a world in which this particular evil does not occur is not better or even worse than a world in which it occurs. This may be logically sound but in itself seems to be pretty much *ad hoc* and would require further support.

²⁶ In his *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, see also Trakakis (2008: 11ff).

²⁷ There is also something like a therapeutic effect to this: sometimes people are inclined to accuse God for the evils they or someone they love have suffered. They ask: 'why did God let that happen?' and struggle for an answer. This is based on the idea that God is somehow responsible for any evil, because he must have had good reasons for allowing them to occur, if not voluntarily inflicting them upon us. But if evil and suffering are a part of the world no matter what happens, then even God cannot prevent them. With this in mind, there is no point in accusing God and asking 'why did you do that to me?' This makes it possible to accept the fact of suffering without struggling with God. We could finally come to say: 'it's ok; it's not your fault'.

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