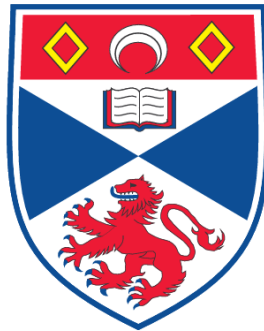


**THE DUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD'S CREATIVE  
PURPOSES AND THE NATURE OF SIN AND EVIL IN KARL  
BARTH'S ACCOUNT OF DAS NICHTIGE  
IN DIALOGUE WITH THE MONIST ACCOUNT OF ALVIN  
PLANTINGA**

**Andrew Torrance**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



**2009**

**Full metadata for this item is available in the St Andrews  
Digital Research Repository**

**at:**

**<https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>**

**Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item:**

**<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/764>**

**This item is protected by original copyright**

**The Dual Relationship between God's Creative  
Purposes and the Nature of Sin and Evil in Karl  
Barth's Account of Das Nichtige**  
*In Dialogue with the Monist Account of  
Alvin Plantinga*

Andrew Torrance

A thesis submitted in candidacy for the degree of MPhil. in Theological Studies

University of St Andrews

**November 2008**

### *Declarations*

I, Andrew Torrance, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 41,689 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 28/11/2008

Signature of Candidate

I was admitted as a research student in October, 2007 and as a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Theological Studies in October, 2007, the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2007 and 2008.

Date 28/11/2008

Signature of Candidate

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Theological Studies in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date 28/11/08

Signature of Supervisor

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews we understand that we are giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. We also understand that the title and the abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker, that my thesis will be electronically accessible for personal or research use unless exempt by award of an embargo as requested below, and that the library has the right to migrate my thesis into new electronic forms as required to ensure continued access to the thesis. We have obtained any third-party copyright permissions that may be required in order to allow such access and migration.

The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the electronic publication of this thesis:

Access to Printed copy and electronic publication of thesis through the University of St Andrews.

Date 4/2/2009

Signature of candidate

Date 3/3/09

Signature of supervisor

## **Abstract**

John Hick argues for a two-fold typology of Christian theodicies, namely, those which offer monist accounts of good and evil and those which offer dualist accounts. Neither approach, he goes on to argue, is compatible with the basic claims of Christian thought. On the one hand, monism risks denying the distinction between good and evil by incorporating evil into the unitary intentionality of the one sovereign God. Dualist accounts, on the other, risk undermining the sovereignty of God by affirming the existence of evil as that which conflicts with God's good (and singular) will. Hick's typology presents us, therefore, with the option of either affirming the full sovereignty of God and denying the truly malevolent nature of evil, or affirming God's opposition to evil but then undermining the full sovereignty of God.

Two immensely influential Christian thinkers, namely, Karl Barth and Alvin Plantinga, are considered as a means of testing this claim. Barth, who is the primary focus, tends toward a dualistic understanding of good and evil whereas Plantinga toward a more monistic understanding. Hick's typology, however, fails to serve their differing understandings of good and evil adequately. An alternative analysis of this distinction is proposed drawing on their distinctive understandings of the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes. This leads to an analysis of the conditions under which it is possible to affirm the truly malevolent nature of evil and God's full sovereignty. It is contended that Barth's approach offers a consistent means of affirming God's radical opposition to evil while also affirming his full sovereignty.

## Contents

I Introduction	1
II Alvin Plantinga's Monist Account of the Relationship Between Sin and Evil and God's Creative Purposes	4
1. Plantinga's Monist Understanding of the Relationship Between Sin and Evil and God's Creative Purposes	4
2. The Nature of Evil in Plantinga's Free Will Defense and his Article 'O Felix Culpa'	7
3. The Present State of Affairs	19
4. The Long-Term State of Affairs	23
III. Karl Barth's Dualist Account of the Relationship Between Sin and Evil and God's Creative Purposes	28
1. Is Barth's account of Das Nichtige, "Halfway Towards a Manichean Dualism"?	28
2. How Could Das Nichtige Have a Negative Effect Over Creation?	40
2.1 In the Shadow of the New Creation	40
2.2 The 'Lacking' or 'Privatio' of this Present World	45
2.3 Barth's Account of the Rejected Possibles that Comprise Das Nichtige	47
2.4 The Unactualised Possibles of Sin and Evil	55
2.5 How Does Barth Understand Das Nichtige to have Achieved its Dominion?	60
3. Why Would God Permit Das Nichtige to Have Any Grasp Over Creation?	65
3.1 Sin and Evil and the Good of the Creature	65
3.2 Barth on the Creature's Personal Autonomy	71
3.3 What Effects Can Das Nichtige Have on Creation?	79
3.4 God's Compassion for His Creation	83
IV. Conclusion	89
Bibliography	97

## I. Introduction

In his book *Evil and the God of Love* John Hick argues, “Christian thought concerning theodicy has always moved between the opposite poles set by the inherent logic of the problem – monism and dualism.”<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, Hick recognises monism and dualism as “the only two wholly consistent solutions that are possible”<sup>2</sup>, on the other hand, however, he also understands that “neither of them is compatible with the basic claims of Christian theology.”<sup>3</sup> Monist philosophies maintain, as Edward Craig writes, “that there is, ultimately, only one thing, and that ‘the Many’ are aspects of it or, to a more radical way of thinking, simply an illusion resulting from our mis-perception of the One.”<sup>4</sup> In relation to evil, monism would seem to suggest, as Hick writes, “that evil is only apparent and would be recognised as good if we could but see it in its full cosmic context.”<sup>5</sup> Dualism, however, holds that there are ultimately two things. With regard to the nature of evil, a dualist account would suggest that, as Hick writes, “good and evil are utterly irreconcilably opposed to one another and that their duality can be overcome only by one destroying the other.”<sup>6</sup>

As Hick notices, the monist position has had a huge influence on Christian thought throughout the years and this is largely because the Christian faith holds to a monotheistic understanding: there is only one God who is sovereign over all things. Hick writes,

“If God is God, and God is good, there cannot be any co-equal contrary reality; and therefore evil must in the end be subject to God’s sovereignty and must exist by a permission flowing from his purpose for his creation. There seems here to be an undeniable truth, to neglect which would be to forfeit the fundamental Christian belief in the reality of God as the sole Creator and ultimate ruler of all things.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Hick, 1977, p21 (full references in bibliography).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Craig, Edward, ‘Monism’ in Craig, 1998, pp474-475.

<sup>5</sup> Hick, 1977, p21.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Monism, however, as Hick also notes, does not come without its problems. The Christian faith is not solely concerned with affirming the full sovereignty of God. It is also significantly concerned with affirming God's direct opposition to sin and evil and his victory over it through the triumphant life, death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. From this perspective, sin and evil are genuinely malevolent and cannot be attributed to the creator God. The problem with a monist understanding is its tendency to suggest that evil is ultimately a good thing (or a fundamental characteristic of a good thing), even although it might seem bad from our immediate perspective. Hick writes,

Christian thought may so strongly emphasise the divine sovereignty that evil is no longer recognised as being genuinely evil and as utterly inimical to God's will and purpose. Evil can thus become domesticated within the divine household and seen as a servant instead of a deadly enemy; and then the theodist finds himself calling evil good and preaching peace where there is no peace.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of the problems evident in monism, some form of dualism can sometimes be considered as a more appropriate option. The problem with holding to this alternative position, however, as Hick suggests, is that it can undermine the sovereignty of God and tend toward the heresy of Manichean dualism. When choosing between the options of monism and dualism (with respect to evil) it would seem that a person is faced with the option of either affirming the full sovereignty of God and denying the truly malevolent nature of evil, or affirming evil as something genuinely negative but then undermining the full sovereignty of God. Is this the case?

To consider this question I shall examine the thought of two immensely influential Christian thinkers, namely, Karl Barth and Alvin Plantinga. As I will suggest, Barth, who will be the primary focus, seems to tend toward a dualistic understanding<sup>8</sup> of good and evil whereas Plantinga leans toward a monistic interpretation. This distinction, however, does not serve their differing understandings

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p21-22.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to associate Barth with a 'Manichean' dualism. This will be discussed in further detail when looking specifically at Barth.

of good and evil adequately<sup>9</sup>. In order to develop a much clearer picture of this distinction there needs to be a consideration of their distinctive understandings of the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes. In the course of thesis we shall consider how far Plantinga and Barth can be accommodated within Hick's two-fold typology and whether it is appropriate to associate them with a monist or dualist approach respectively. This will raise the question as to whether Hick is correct in his suggestion that there are only two 'wholly consistent' options.

As has been noted, the primary focus of this thesis will be to evaluate the viability of Barth's account in the face of the positions he is challenging, namely, Manichean dualism on the one hand and monism on the other. The secondary discussion of Plantinga will, however, make an important contribution to the framework of this thesis. The reason for this is that Plantinga would seem to provide a 'monist' approach that, unlike Manichean dualism, finds much more credence and is thus more persuasive within contemporary Christian thought. We shall argue, however, that Plantinga's account carries implications which appear to be in tension with established interpretations of the Gospel message. A brief analysis of his reasoning and its potential problems will lead directly to a discussion of Barth. Hopefully, this analysis will serve to bring into focus both the applicability and significance of Barth's argument.

---

<sup>9</sup> The haziness of this distinction is made apparent when it is considered that Barth seeks to affirm God's full sovereignty over good and evil and Plantinga wants to hold that good and evil are not one and of the same thing.



## II. Alvin Plantinga's Monist Account of the Relationship Between Sin and Evil and God's Creative Purposes

In both his exposition of the free-will defense and his article 'O Felix Culpa' Alvin Plantinga would seem to develop a monist understanding of the relationship between evil (as this includes sin) and God's creative purposes. This is made apparent when he incorporates the existence of sin and evil into the one sovereign will of God by holding that God ultimately intends their existence for the purpose of achieving some greater good. Sin and evil are, in other words, a required means through which God is able to create the best of all possible worlds. They are ultimately *aspects of God's one* all-encompassing creative purpose.

Two of the greater goods which Plantinga holds to be necessary characteristics of this best of all possible worlds are, first, human 'freedom' defined in a particular way, which inevitably leads to sin and evil, and second, the atonement, which is conditional upon there being sin and evil. As such, because sin and evil are an intended means whereby God creates the best of all possible worlds they are ultimately granted status as a purposeful good<sup>10</sup>, even if they might not appear to be so when viewed from our present perspectives within this world and, moreover, even if Scripture does not seem to present them in this way.

### 1. *Plantinga's Monist Understanding of the Relationship Between Sin and Evil and God's Creative Purposes*

When a person is given a painful injection for the purpose of vaccination they are given it for the good reason of preventing illness or disease. This action provides a reasonable analogy for the monist understanding of how sin and evil can relate to God's creative purposes. For Plantinga, God directly intends the pains of sin and evil for the world with the good purposes of first, providing humanity with all the immense goods of the atonement<sup>11</sup>, as he argues in his article 'O Felix Culpa'<sup>12</sup>, and

---

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Diller also argues that Plantinga would seem to present evil as a 'functional good' in his article, 'Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good World?' (Cf. Diller, 2008, p96).

<sup>11</sup> Plantinga also argues that sin and evil pave the way to the incarnation. It does not, however, appear that Christ's becoming incarnate is conditional upon there being sin and evil in the world. For this reason, the incarnation will not be considered in this context because this discussion is primarily

second, by giving it the very great good of ‘contra-causal’ ‘freedom’, as he argues in his account of the free will defense. One major non-parallelism with the vaccination analogy however (in relation to Plantinga’s accounts), is that in this analogy the pain received in an injection is not a directly intended means for the purpose of the vaccination but an inevitable consequence.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, if it were possible for doctors to give out pain-free injections it would indeed be the case that most good-natured doctors would opt for this possibility. Plantinga’s monist understanding, however, presents the pains of sin and evil as a purposeful condition (or means) in and of themselves to the end of giving the world the atonement and ‘contra-causal’ ‘freedom’. They are, it could be said, the desired ‘collateral damage’ or integral collateral features of the possible world that God chooses to actualise.<sup>14</sup>

Plantinga is clearly correct in asserting that if there were no sin and evil then there would be no need for the atonement. Furthermore, his suggestion that if there were no sin and evil in the world, then creatures would not be living by a ‘contra-causal’ ‘freedom’ but a ‘God-caused’ freedom is also defensible given that, from a Christian standpoint, righteousness is conditional upon the intervening, redemptive and reconciling action of God.<sup>15</sup> The problem with Plantinga’s account, however, is that he would seem to suggest that the atonement and ‘contra-causal’ ‘freedom’ are an “aim”<sup>16</sup> or ‘ultimate end’ of God’s creative purposes (i.e. a desired part of their realisation and ultimate goal) as opposed to a means whereby he can achieve an even greater ultimate end i.e. the right relationship with his creatures. Plantinga writes, “No matter how many excellent creatures there are in the world, no matter how rich and beautiful and sinless their lives, the aggregated value of their lives would not match that of the incarnation and atonement; any worlds with incarnation and atonement would be better yet.”<sup>17</sup> In this statement Plantinga seems to suggest that the present sinful state of affairs with its need for the atonement is even greater than the full

---

focused on the existence of sin and evil with relation to God’s creative purposes. Cf. Diller, 2008, p90-92.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Plantinga in Van Inwagen, 2004, pp5-14.

<sup>13</sup> As such there is an inherent duality in this analogy – the pain neither comes from, nor is intended by the doctor but, rather, comes from and is intended by something else i.e. the victim’s neurological make-up.

<sup>14</sup> In Plantinga’s account, God creates the best of all possible worlds. God’s creative intentions are, however, limited by transworld depravity such that what he desires for creation is constrained by what is compatible with (what Plantinga considers to be) significant human ‘freedom’.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rom. 3.10-26 and Phil. 2.13.

<sup>16</sup> Plantinga in Van Inwagen, 2004, p12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p10.

actualisation of the new creation would be, had it been possible for God to bring it about without subjecting it to a prior sinful and evil state of affairs. In other words, it would appear that Plantinga presents sin and evil as actually willed by God *to the extent that they provide warrant for the atonement and, still more controversially, the incarnation*. This problem becomes even more apparent when he writes,

Contrast two kinds of possible worlds. In the first kind, there are free creatures who always do only what is right, who live in harmony with God and each other, and do so, let's add, through all eternity. Now for each of these worlds W of this kind, there is a world W\* of the second kind. In W\* God creates the very same creatures as in W; but in W\* these free creatures rebel against him, fall into sin and wickedness, turn their backs upon God. In W\*, however, God graciously provides a means of salvation by way of incarnation and atonement. My claim is that for any such worlds W and W\*, W\* is a better world than W.<sup>18</sup>

As I shall argue, neither the atonement nor 'contra-causal' 'freedom' should be considered as an 'end' in themselves but as a 'means' whereby God is able to develop the right relationship with his creation. As such, were it possible for God to develop the right relationship with his creation without the existence of sin and evil he would have chosen to do so. The simple reason for this is that sin and evil constitute nothing less than a real enemy and menace to God and his creative purposes.<sup>19</sup>

The main difficulties that lie in Plantinga's understanding and the factors that tie him to a monist understanding are, first, his view that God ultimately desires the existence of sin and evil as a means to the greater end which is the atonement<sup>20</sup> and, second, his view that God ultimately wills creation's present 'contra-causal' 'freedom' *as it is* consumed by sin and evil.<sup>21</sup> The Gospel, however, presents neither the atonement nor creation's present 'freedom' as ends in themselves but as a means to the ultimate end of God's developing a loving relationship with creation (Cf. Eph.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp10-11.

<sup>19</sup> This does not mean, however, that sin and evil's consequent existence cannot be incorporated into God's creative purposes and used for a greater good, what it means is that they are ultimately not a directly intended nor desired part of God's creative purposes.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Plantinga in Van Inwagen, 2004, pp12-13.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Plantinga, 1974, pp184-191 and Plantinga, 1967, pp135-149.

1.4-5). From this Christian perspective sin and evil are not presented as a means willed by God but, rather, as a genuine problem that arises when creatures are subject to their own ‘contra-causal’ ‘freedom’. The *consequent* problem of sin and evil is then portrayed as being dealt with by God in the atonement (as opposed to being a directly intended set of circumstances that would pave the way to the atonement). Sin and evil are not therefore presented as a problem willed by God, as Plantinga seems to suggest. They are problems that arise from within creation as the result of God’s intending to subject it to a life consumed by its own *individualistic* form of ‘contra-causal’ ‘freedom’, as opposed to a life animated by the Holy Spirit, in Jesus Christ lived out in obedience to the Father.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. *The Nature of Evil in Plantinga’s Free Will Defense and his Article ‘O Felix Culpa’.*

The argument that Plantinga presents in his recent article ‘O Felix Culpa’ suggests that he interprets the relationship between evil<sup>23</sup> and God’s creative purposes monistically. It claims that evil is a predetermined *part of* God’s creative purposes. In this article he argues that God requires and desires evil as the necessary condition and means to the ends of the atonement; the pain of evil is, as it were, a required instrument of God’s creative purposes.

Although Plantinga’s Felix Culpa approach might suggest a monist position, this does not necessarily mean that all forms of the Felix Culpa approach entail a monist understanding. If, for example, one held that although God did not directly desire sin and evil, he was able *consequently* to incorporate their existence into his creative purposes<sup>24</sup>, this sort of Felix Culpa approach would not necessarily imply a monist understanding. Such a position will be discussed further in dialogue with Barth who would also seem to hold to a Felix Culpa understanding. The latter, however, unlike Plantinga, does not commit himself to a ‘monist’ understanding that portrays sin and evil as a desired part of God’s creative purposes.

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rom. 8.1-17.

<sup>23</sup> Plantinga refers specifically to evil and not sin. However, his account of evil would seem to imply sinfulness.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. he was able to use the atonement to achieve the right relationship with his creatures.

As suggested above, Plantinga's Felix Culpa approach tends in the direction of a monist understanding. However, it is difficult to argue that his free will account implies such a position. If, on the one hand, Plantinga is suggesting in his free-will account that God created creatures for the ends of having a particular form of 'contra-causal' 'freedom' that is consumed with sin and evil, then he would be incorporating this sinful form of 'freedom' into God's ultimate creative purposes. In so doing he would be presenting this sinful 'freedom' as the true and perfect form of 'freedom' and would indeed be taking the monist stance with respect to sin and evil. If, on the other hand, he is merely suggesting that God gave creatures their particular form of 'contra-causal' 'freedom' as a means whereby he could ultimately develop the right relationship with his creatures, he would not be interpreting this sinful 'freedom' as an end itself but as a means to another end in his ultimate creative purposes.<sup>25</sup> As such, he would not be holding that this world has been created by God to live by this sinful form of 'freedom', but to have been created to live temporarily by this 'freedom' such that it could ultimately be raised into a true and perfect freedom. If Plantinga were to hold this latter position he could not consider God to have caused *both* the sinful and sinless forms of freedom directly because, apart from a number of other reasons, this would imply a division in God's creative purposes.<sup>26</sup> As such, the sinful form of 'freedom' would need to be understood as achieving its sinfulness on the basis of something else distinct from God.

Plantinga understands that there is indeed something other than God which causes creation to be consumed by sin and evil. He considers this 'something else' to be creation itself as it lives by its own 'contra-causal' 'freedom'.<sup>27</sup> What this 'contra-causality' implies is not that there is no cause to influence creation's 'freedom' but, that there is no cause *external to creation itself* that influences creation's 'freedom'. As such creation's sinfulness needs to be understood as being caused by creation to the extent that it is guided by its own 'free-will'. It is, in other words, the result of

---

<sup>25</sup> When suggesting that contra-causal freedom is a sinful form of freedom and is given to the world by God (Rom. 8.20), this does not necessarily mean that God gave sin to the world. Creation's 'contra-causal' freedom is not sinful, in and of itself, but is a freedom that inevitably leads to sin and evil.

<sup>26</sup> Such a division of God's will into a will for a sinful form of freedom and a will for a sinless form of freedom would suggest an eternal conflict within the mind of God. This would also mean, unless one wanted to separate God's being from his will, a dichotomisation of God and therefore imply some new form of Sabellianism.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Plantinga, 1974, pp184-191 and Plantinga, 1967, pp135-149. In holding that God does not cause sin and evil, Plantinga is not adhering to the monist position with respect to sin and evil itself. This does not, however, rule out the possibility of him holding to a monist understanding of the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes.

creation existing freely apart from the guiding and sustaining hand of God and being guided by ‘nothing’ external to itself. In holding to this position, Plantinga is advocating a duality between goodness (as it comes from God) and sinfulness or evil (as it arises from within creation) and therefore, in this respect, he is not a monist. However, as his argument develops he does seem to move towards a monist account with respect to his understanding of the role of sin and evil within God’s creative purposes.

In the next stage of his argument Plantinga appears to suggest that God created the world, not for the end of establishing a sinless relationship between him and his creatures, but for the end of its living by its own particular ‘contra-causal’ ‘freedom’ as it is apart from God and consumed by sin and evil. As such, although Plantinga might not seem to portray sin and evil as being caused by God, he fails to protect himself sufficiently from the charge that he portrays them as goods belonging to his creative purposes. If this submission to sin and evil is understood, from Plantinga’s ‘Christian’ epistemic base, as an essential characteristic of ‘significant’ ‘freedom’ then he would also need to be holding them to be an ultimately intended and desired part of God’s creative purposes. Under these circumstances the permitted ‘contra-causally free action’ is given a higher and more significant standing in God’s creative purposes than the guided ‘righteous action’. Plantinga writes,

A world containing creatures who are sometimes *significantly* free is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but he cannot *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if he does so, then they are not *significantly* free after all; they do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, he must create creatures capable of moral evil; and he cannot leave these creatures *free* to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so.<sup>28</sup>

If Plantinga had wanted to continue to avoid a monist understanding the next stage in his argument would have needed to focus on God’s delivering this world

---

<sup>28</sup> Plantinga, 1974, pp166-267 (emphases mine on ‘significantly’).

from its present situation to its ultimate end as the new creation, as this is characterised by a true and righteous freedom.<sup>29</sup> This stance, which corresponds to Barth's, conflicts with the monist position by implying a duality within God's creative purposes - between his intention to raise creation to a new level of *koinonia* with him (what amounts to a new reality) and his temporary intention to leave creation partly subject to itself.<sup>30</sup> This duality very importantly, however, does not suggest a division in God's creative purposes, nor does it present God as changing his mind. What it suggests is that there are two stages in God's creative purposes: a short-term stage and a long-term stage. The first 'short-term' stage involves God subjecting his creation to an existence that is temporarily and somewhat apart from him. It is an existence characterised by 'contra-causal' 'freedom' and creation's own sinful and evil frustrations. Such a 'contra-causal' path is portrayed as a fallen way that is in radical need of God's causal intervention and determination – God's redemption and reconciliation. It is a way that is "groaning in labour pains" (Rom. 8.22) for adoption into a life of participation within the Trinity: a life animated by the Holy Spirit, in Jesus Christ lived out in obedience to the Father.<sup>31</sup>

This first stage, however, is not an end in itself but a means to the end of the second stage. The second 'long-term' stage is the new creation as it is raised out of its first sinful stage into perfect communion with God.<sup>32</sup> In this understanding sin and evil are presented as a reality that God temporarily permits, but does not ultimately intend. This approach contrasts with Plantinga's understanding because it does not present the fallen 'contra-causal' 'freedom' of the first stage as a desired part of God's creative purposes. By understanding the sin-and-evil-inducing 'freedom' as a

---

<sup>29</sup> It is not being suggested here, that when creation is raised into new life it suddenly becomes 'automated' by God. What is being suggested, is that creation is freely raised and awakened into subjection to God by being brought into participation within the triune *koinonia*. When creation is raised into new life, in this manner, it becomes free from its bondage to sin. In Christian thought, the world has not been created for individuality and sinfulness but for a loving obedience under God, and so, therefore, it is in this new life that a person finds their essential freedom. A more detailed discussion of how creation sustains its freedom through this transformation would be highly significant here. However, such a discussion warrants its own thesis and would extend past the boundaries of this one.

<sup>30</sup> It is fundamental, for Barth, that the present creation is not considered to be leading a life completely independent from God. For Barth, creation is *always* dependent on its Creator for its continuing existence and preservation. Cf. Barth, *CD III:1*, 1958, p94.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Rom. 8.1-17.

<sup>32</sup> Between these two stages God's will does not change. In both these stages God desires one thing – to develop the right relationship with his creation. The factors that distinguish the first stage from the second stage – such as sin and evil - are not factors that God directly wills for, but are 'consequent inevitabilities' which God permits in order to fulfil his one particular will for creation.

desired part of God's creative purposes, Plantinga makes them out to be a part of God's ultimate will and in so doing attaches himself to a monist understanding of the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes.

Before entering into a further discussion of whether Plantinga wholly commits himself to a monist understanding of the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes it is important to grasp the distinction between permission (indirect intention) and direct intention with respect to God's creative purposes. Within the context of this thesis the distinction will be made as follows: if a particular aspect of creation is directly intended by God, it is God that is directly responsible for causing that aspect to exist;<sup>33</sup> if, on the other hand, God merely permits a particular aspect of creation, although it might have been God that intended to let that aspect come into existence, this does not necessarily mean that he directly caused its existence. Although this distinction might seem to be fairly clear it becomes much more difficult to affirm when God's omniscience and particularly his foreknowledge are taken into account. If God creates the world *ex nihilo* with the foreknowledge of how it will turn out, including the occurrence of each and every instance of sin and evil, it is much harder to suggest that God merely permits, and does not directly or intentionally cause sin and evil to become a reality.

In order to suggest that God merely permitted sin and evil to come into existence, it might appear that one needs to affirm some form of Manichean dualism in order to explain how there could be something else, apart from God, which directly caused the existence of sin and evil (and which God can permit to cause directly the existence of sin and evil). If, however, as suggested above, sin and evil are understood as caused by creation itself as the indirect result of God's giving it its *own* 'contra-

---

<sup>33</sup> The word 'intention', in and of itself, does not necessarily imply direct responsibility. For example, in Acts 2. 23-24 it is written, "[Jesus of Nazareth], handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you [that are the Israelites] crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law." Then in Acts 4.27-28 it is written, "Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." Although this passage clearly suggests that God intended his Son to die on the cross, it does not suggest that God was *directly* responsible for causing his Son to suffer and die on the cross; it was moreover, 'Herod and Pontius Pilate' with 'the Israelites' and 'those outside the law'/'the Gentiles'. Jesus died at the hands of the sinful world and, although it might be God who, in his foreknowledge, directly intended and was directly responsible for sending and leading his Son to suffer and die on the cross, he cannot be considered as the one who was directly responsible for causing his Son to suffer and die on the cross. In other words, he did not move the lips, hands, legs, etc. of Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel.



causal' 'freedom', this is not such a problem. Under these circumstances, although it might be God who directly gives creation its 'contra-causal' 'freedom', he is not the immediate cause of everything that results from creation's being subject to this 'freedom'. Furthermore, although God might foreknow all that would occur within this set of circumstances, it would not be his foreknowledge that was responsible for causing all that occurs, but, rather, all that occurs that is responsible for causing God to have his particular foreknowledge. This position will be discussed in more detail when considering Barth. For now, however, I wish to focus on Plantinga's approach.

Consider the following three points that Plantinga makes in his understanding of what it means to be free:

1. If a "possible person P is free, P contains neither the property of performing that action nor the property of refraining from performing it."<sup>34</sup>
2. If God wills to create a world with free persons as opposed to 'quasiautomata'<sup>35</sup>, Plantinga argues, "he cannot causally or otherwise determine them to do only what is right; for if he does so then they do not do what is right *freely*."<sup>36</sup>
3. "[I]t is clear that the proposition *Every possible free person performs at least one wrong action* is possibly true."<sup>37</sup>

In these claims Plantinga suggests that it is possible that God created creatures for the purpose of living by a 'contra-causal' 'freedom' that is characterised by every possible free creature performing at least one wrong action. When it is taken into account that God would have foreknown that giving creatures 'contra-causal' 'freedom' would lead to every possible free creature performing at least one wrong action, such a consequence would need to be considered to be not only possible but inevitable. As such, living by 'contra-causal' 'freedom' would also imply unfreedom:

---

<sup>34</sup> Plantinga, 1967, p145.

<sup>35</sup> "These are beings who always do what is right because the way that they have been created means that they are unable to do otherwise." Ibid. p132.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p132.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p146. This possibility is what Plantinga refers to as transworld depravity.

living in bondage to performing at least one wrong action or living as, to refer to Rom. 6.18, “slaves to unrighteousness”.

This raises the question as to whether Plantinga’s understanding of what it means to be free is in tension with the Pauline understanding of true freedom as a life lived in Christ and by the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> Christian freedom on Paul’s account, is diametrically opposed to being “slaves to sin... [and] free from the control of righteousness” (Rom. 6.20). It is defined as being “free from sin and... slaves to righteousness” (Rom. 6.18).<sup>39</sup> This freedom, brought about through the causative work of the Trinity, cannot be fully achieved in this present world. It is attained in death when the ‘old self’ (the person animated by the flesh (*soma psychikon*)/the person in Adam) is brought to an end and the ‘new self’ (the person animated by the Spirit (*soma pneumatikon*)/the person in Christ) is raised up in the ultimate fulfilment and consummation of God’s creative purposes.<sup>40</sup> As it is written in Romans 6.6, “We know that our old self was crucified with [Christ] so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved by sin.”

The difficulty that Plantinga’s account would seem to have with the Pauline account of what it means to be free is that unlike his account of ‘contra-causal’ ‘freedom’, freedom for Paul is wholly dependent upon an external causal agency i.e. God.<sup>41</sup> In holding to the criterion of ‘contra-causality’ in his definition of freedom Plantinga would seem to elevate the importance of the permitted ‘contra-causally free action’ over the ‘guided righteous action’.

An important thing to note here is that the problem of causality impinging on freedom is not only in tension with the Christian account of freedom. It is also a problem for Plantinga’s account because, as it is written in 2 Pet. 2.19, “people are slaves to whatever masters them”. What this verse would seem to imply here is that no freedom is completely free from causality. Even Plantinga’s ‘contra-causal’ freedom is still subject to an internal or individualistic causality i.e. to the self as master. To live solely by this freedom is to live in bondage to the self - to live *incurvatus in se*, to use Luther’s expression. It is on this basis that the Pauline account of freedom that I am proposing, would appear to be in conflict with Plantinga’s.

---

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Rom. 8.2, 1 Cor. 15.42-44 and 2 Cor. 3.17.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III*: 2, p306.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Eph. 4.22-24; and Col 3.9-10.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III*: 2, 1960, p194.

The self-oriented, self-seeking individuality, which possibly (or inevitably) leads to every possible free creature performing at least one wrong action, is portrayed by Christian thought as the very negation of love and as defining what it means to be a slave to sin.<sup>42</sup> To live solely by this proud and (apparently) self-grounded freedom is to be led astray and, to commandeer Plantinga's word, 'automated' by one's own selfish desires; it is to be guided by sin and evil over and against being guided by God.<sup>43</sup> As such, from a Christian perspective Plantinga's interpretation of 'freedom' cannot be understood as meeting an essential Pauline criterion for what it means to be free. It should, moreover, be understood as articulating a misguided or disordered form of unfreedom<sup>44</sup> that stands in direct conflict with the essential freedom 'in Christ' – the freedom that for which Christian thought considers the world to have been created. From a theological perspective, true human freedom requires to be defined in terms of the world's *telos* rather than with exclusive recourse to our natural state of apparent freedom. To quote Karl Barth, "Not by virtue of our own freedom are we what we are; but rather we are what we are not – by the freedom of God."<sup>45</sup>

Although Plantinga might seem to advocate a misguided form of 'freedom' as true freedom, this does not necessarily tie him down to a monist understanding of sin and evil. To associate him with such a position would depend on whether a) he considered God as giving creation its particular 'freedom' with the direct intention of its leading to unrighteousness and unfreedom or whether b) he considered creation to be given its particular 'freedom' with the consequent possibility of its leading to the existence of sin and evil. The latter non-monist account would seem to be the case for Plantinga because he holds that if creation is to attain its particular 'contra-causal' 'freedom', "[God] cannot causally or otherwise determine them to do only what is right"<sup>46</sup>. In this understanding it is the particular 'freedom' and not the sin and evil that is the goal of God's creative purposes. Therefore, although this might suggest a monist account of the particular 'freedom' that leads to sin and evil within God's

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Ps. 119.36; Prov. 18.1; Rom. 2.8; 1 Cor. 10.24, 13.5; Phil. 2.3.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Rom. 8.1-17 and 1 Cor. 15. 42-44.. Also, cf. Barth, *CD IV:1*, 1956, pp745-756 – "But the freedom of [man] is not the evil freedom which man in his pride has made for himself and which he thinks he can possess for himself and use for himself. As a genuine freedom for this counter-movement it is completely alien to the personal reason and power of proud man entangled in his pride. It is a new freedom and therefore his true freedom."

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Jas. 3.16.

<sup>45</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 1933, p237.

<sup>46</sup> Plantinga, 1967. p132.

creative purposes<sup>47</sup>, it would not imply a monist account of sin and evil within God's creative purposes. As such, for Plantinga it seems that it is not the wrong actions that are an essential part of God's creative purposes but the 'free' capacity that leads creatures to perform wrong actions.

Although there might seem to be some problems in Plantinga's account, he would seem to be right in asserting that unrestricted secular 'freedom', logically involves the capacity to perform wrong actions and the very fact that Plantinga is drawing a distinction between right and wrong actions would again seem to imply that his free will account does not tie him down to a monist understanding of sin and evil. However, when it is considered that Plantinga also holds that the capacity to do wrong may include a desire to do wrong, as is implied by the statement, "it is clear that the proposition *Every possible free person performs at least one wrong action* is possibly true"<sup>48</sup>, it becomes difficult to ascertain that Plantinga's free will account does not entail a monist understanding of the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes. If Plantinga holds that true 'freedom' may be characterised by a will to perform wrong actions and that God gave creatures this particular 'freedom' because it is the 'significant' form of freedom, it would seem that Plantinga holds God to have given his creatures this specific 'contra-causal' 'freedom' with the full knowledge that it leads to unrighteousness and a life bound by a sinful will.

This interpretation of Plantinga, however, could very easily be countered by another suggestion. It is clear that Plantinga does not hold that God has given his creatures 'contra-causal' freedom with the direct intention of their being led into an unrighteous and imprisoned state. Moreover, it would seem he holds that God gave his creatures this freedom with the intention of wanting to create a world with free persons as opposed to 'quasiautomata'; the inevitable consequence of which is that the world becomes consumed by sin and evil.

This counter-interpretation, however, could also be countered by yet another suggestion. It might be correct to assert that having 'contra-causal' 'freedom' might stop persons from becoming 'quasiautomata' in Plantinga's sense of the term, i.e. "beings who always do what is right because the way that they have been created means that they are unable to do otherwise"<sup>49</sup>. However, having this 'contra-causal'

---

<sup>47</sup> I.e. it might suggest that this particular freedom is included within God's creative purposes.

<sup>48</sup> Plantinga, 1967, p146.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p132.

‘freedom’ would not stop persons from becoming ‘quasiautomata’ in another sense: ‘beings who will always freely perform at least one wrong action because the way that they have been created means that they are unable to do otherwise’. As cited above, “people are slaves to whatever masters them” (2 Pet. 2.19), and therefore people are always going to be ‘quasiautomata’ in at least one respect, even if it is through being ‘automated’ by the natural, internal and wrongful conditions of one’s own existence. As such, Plantinga cannot easily be reconciled with the view that God has given his creatures ‘contra-causal’ freedom with the direct intention of wanting to create a world with truly free persons. Rather, Plantinga must be understood as suggesting that God wanted to create a world in which his creatures had a *particular* type of freedom.

If Plantinga is right in his affirmation that a ‘contra-causally’ free world is what God ultimately intended, then there are, at least two aspects of a theological account with which it is hard to come to grips, namely:

1. *God’s causal intervention in the transformative processes of redemption and reconciliation.* Would God’s *causal* intervention in the processes of redemption, justification and reconciliation not undermine Plantinga’s suggestion that ‘contra-causal’ ‘freedom’ lies at the heart of what it means to be free? Furthermore, would Scripture’s account of God’s redemption and reconciliation of the world to himself not strongly conflict with Plantinga’s suggestion that “God does not *bring it about* or *cause it to be the case* either that I take or that I refrain from [an] action; he neither causes this to be so through the laws he establishes, nor by direct intervention, nor in *any other way*”<sup>50</sup>? Is Barth not right to suggest (in accordance with Jn. 8.32-36), “A man does not have freedom unless the Son makes him free”<sup>51</sup>?
2. *What it means to be a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6.17-22).* On the one hand, Scripture holds that significant freedom is found when a person becomes a slave to righteousness (lives in obedience to God) while, on the other hand, Plantinga holds that significant freedom is found when an individual can and may decide to do what is

---

<sup>50</sup> Plantinga, 1974, p171 (emphasis mine on ‘*any other way*’).

<sup>51</sup> Barth, *CD IV:1*, 1956, p745. He also writes here, “The Son makes the man free to believe in Him. Therefore faith in Him is the act of a right freedom, not although but just because it is the work of the Son.”

right or what is wrong (what a person does is solely up to them).<sup>52</sup> One could say that for Plantinga a person is ‘significantly free’<sup>53</sup> when they are a ‘slave’ to their own individual will<sup>54</sup> (aside from God’s desire for them to be righteous) - to their own impurity and iniquity.<sup>55</sup> If this is the case, then Plantinga’s account of what it means to be ‘significantly’ free is clearly in tension with scripture’s account<sup>56, 57</sup>.

Scripture affirms that God created the world for a covenantal relationship with him that is mediated through the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, from a specifically Christian standpoint, this may be taken to suggest that it is only through a life of full participation within this relationship, in Christ and by the Spirit, that true freedom is found.<sup>59</sup> Under these circumstances, it is not the ‘contra-causally’ free action that is righteous but, rather, the obedient action; the goal of creation is not individual freedom but a loving obedience to God. For actions to be truly obedient to God, and therefore truly loving and righteous<sup>60</sup>, creatures cannot depend upon their individual will but must depend upon the external influence of God in Christ to raise them into this true freedom.<sup>61</sup> This movement, it should be affirmed, is a Trinitarian

---

<sup>52</sup> Plantinga, 1967, p131ff – “Whether the free men created by God would always do what is right would presumably be up to them; for all we know they might sometimes exercise their freedom to do what is wrong.” (139) This leads us to ask the question, does the Christian God really desire to free his creatures *for* wrongdoing as opposed to free them *from* wrongdoing? Are we not in danger of moving towards a semi-Pelagian understanding if we accept an account that draws on the importance of God leaving things *up to us*? Is it really the case that God desires to leave his creatures to “do what is right freely” (132) (i.e. ‘freely in Plantinga’s sense - without God’s guiding hands to cause or determine our righteousness (132))’? Would it not be better to emphasise God’s desire for his creatures to find righteousness through a life lived in Christ, by the Spirit in obedience to the Father? (Cf. 1 Cor. 26-31, 2 Cor. 10.17, Gal. 2. 15-21, 6.13-14)

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Plantinga, 1974, pp166-167

<sup>54</sup> In Plantinga’s account of what it means to be significantly free it is not God that is master over the creature, but the creature that is master over the creature i.e. the self as master.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Rom. 6.19.

<sup>56</sup> If Plantinga is going to be considered as writing in accordance with scripture’s account of freedom he would need to be implying that righteousness is the consequence of a creature’s individual ‘free’ will. As such, all ‘contra-causally’ ‘free’ would also need to be considered as righteous actions. This would inevitably mean that sin could not be understood as a transgression from God’s will but as its very outworking and expression. Furthermore, it would also entail that creation’s present state of existence is not sinful but righteous. This, however, is clearly not the case and Plantinga himself holds that self-led actions (as oppose to God-led) can sometimes be wrong actions. If this is the case, then Plantinga would not seem to be consistent with Scripture when he affirms that having a ‘free’ will to perform right *and* wrong actions is central to what it means to be significantly free.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. 2 Pet. 2.19.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Heb. 8.6-13, 9.11-15.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Rom. 8.1-17 Cor 3.17 and Gal. 5.1.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Rom. 6.16-18 and 2 Jn. 1.6.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Gal. 2.19-21.

movement: it is by the Spirit that a person is raised up in Christ to participate in a new life characterised by true freedom and obedience to the Father.<sup>62</sup>

By understanding this present fallen freedom as describing what it means to be free, Plantinga does not leave sufficient room for the Christian belief that true freedom is found when the world enters into a new life of obedience in Christ by the Spirit through the *caused* transformative processes of redemption and reconciliation. Although Plantinga's account of what it means to be free is problematic, he does make the important point that God does not desire to create a world of what he refers to as 'quasiautomata', but did indeed will to give creatures a personal autonomy that would enable them to develop their own personal identities. It is precisely such creatures, who develop their own particular identities and who live as part of a particular community, with whom God desires to develop a real relationship.<sup>63</sup>

By giving his creatures this 'freedom' God would have been able to create a world of self-aware individuals with whom he could develop a genuine relationship.<sup>64</sup> For God to develop a mutual and genuinely loving relationship with his creation, his creatures need to be given the opportunity to live by their own 'contra-causal' 'freedom'. Scripture, however, does not present this stage of God's creative purposes as an ultimate end nor does it present it as a stage characterised by true freedom. Scripture holds true and righteous freedom as being achieved when individuals are raised into a new life in Christ through God's *causal* intervention in the ultimate consummation of God's creative purposes.<sup>65</sup> This resurrection does not involve God 'automating' his creatures into a relationship, to use Plantinga's wording, but involves, as Barth writes, "a relationship between two persons in which these are brought into perfect mutual coordination within the framework of a definite order, yet with no destruction of their two-sided identity and particularity, but rather its

---

<sup>62</sup> Cf. 2 Pet. 1.3-4.

<sup>63</sup> A key problem that arises here concerns those creatures who do not have the opportunity to develop their own particular identities in this present world e.g. those who die as infants. This problem perhaps warrants its own section. However, to engage in a bit of guesswork and make a brief suggestion for how this problem might be resolved it might be suggested that such creatures could have the opportunity to develop their own particular identities after death. Such identities (that are not 'automated') could be achieved by participating in a new life not just with God but also with their fellow creatures who have had the opportunity to start developing their own particular identities in this world.

<sup>64</sup> This direct intention of God to create an 'other' will be discussed further when looking at Barth. Cf. Barth, *CD III*: 2, 1960, p92.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Eph. 1.8-14.

confirmation and expression”<sup>66</sup>. As will be discussed later, this is, for Barth, the very essence of what it means to have freedom in communion with God. Furthermore it is the very essence of what it means to be truly human because it is this sort of freedom for which humanity has been created.<sup>67</sup>

By holding that ‘contra-causality’ and a depraved desire for wrongdoing (to which ‘contra-causality’ inevitably leads) are at the heart of what it means to be free, Plantinga would seem to consider his account of ‘freedom’ and all that results from it<sup>68</sup> as a desired end of God’s creative purposes. In so doing he would seem to present sin and evil as an ultimate *part of* God’s creative purposes suggesting a monist understanding of the relationship between sin and evil and God’s creative purposes. It may be argued at this point that it is unfair to make these accusations of Plantinga because his account does not aim to concern itself with the possibility of another freedom that awaits creation in the future. To the extent, however, that Plantinga wants to engage in a consistently *Christian* account (that is, from his specifically Christian epistemic base), he should at the very least leave room for the possibility of such a future *redeemed* world: the new creation which Christian thought considers to be the fulfilment of the best of all possible worlds.<sup>69</sup> By disregarding this possibility of a further ultimate end, Plantinga’s monist understanding would seem to elevate the ‘freedom’ of the present fallen world, and all that results from it, over and above Scripture’s account of what it actually means to be free.

### 3. *The Present State of Affairs*

If it is the case that such major problems arise when holding to Plantinga’s position, then the question still remains as to how else it is possible to proceed when asking the question of how evil could end up as a ‘feature of’ God’s good creation? If it is considered that creatures really do live a life consumed by sin and evil and that

---

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD IV.3*, 1956, p535.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD IV:1*, 1956, pp100-101

<sup>68</sup> Unless, he wanted to suggest that the ultimate outworking of God’s creative purposes is imperfect. This would, of course, significantly undermine God’s omnipotence and/or good/consistent purposes (for something to be bad within God’s creative purposes it would have to be inconsistent with another one of his creative purposes).

<sup>69</sup> Plantinga would want to hold that this present creation and the new creation are the same possible world. However, he does not seem to take into sufficient account the Christian understanding that the present creation will ultimately find fulfilment when it is transformed into the new creation. Rather, he tends to present this world as a world that has already found its fulfilment, for example, through its ‘freedom’ to make ‘significantly free’ decisions apart from God’s guiding hands.



this state of affairs is not desired by the all sovereign God, then it would perhaps need to be considered that sin and evil which temporarily consume this situation are the unwilled but inevitable consequence of an existence that is not ultimately willed by God.<sup>70</sup> However, there is a problem that might seem to arise here: if something within creation is inevitable and is not understood as a part of God's will, is God's omnipotence and sovereignty not being called into question?

In order to respond to this problem a consideration is needed of the place of sin and evil in relation to God's creative purposes. If sin and evil are given a high standing then they could be considered to be an ultimate intention in God's creative purposes. If, on the other hand, they are given no standing then they could be considered an unwilled but inevitable 'consequence' of God's creative purposes – to speak analogically, the 'collateral damage' of God's creative agency.<sup>71</sup> The key distinction here is between 'ultimate intention' which implies predetermination on God's part, and 'consequence' which does not. If it is the case that God foreknew sin and evil would come into existence, this does not necessarily mean that they are to be understood as a 'predetermined',<sup>72</sup> part of his creative purposes. Sin and evil could, moreover, be understood as an unwilled but inevitable consequence of the particular creation that God ultimately intended to create to be *other* than himself.<sup>73</sup>

In his *Felix Culpa* theodicy, Plantinga considers evil to be an instrument that God desired for the purpose of bringing about the atonement.<sup>74</sup> If, however, evil is understood as an unwilled but inevitable consequence (e.g. a consequence of God's giving creatures the 'freedom' to become self-aware individuals), then evil can be understood as a genuine and serious problem that is dealt with in the atonement. This position would not risk undermining God's omnipotence and would simultaneously

---

<sup>70</sup> This will be considered in further detail when discussing Barth.

<sup>71</sup> Of course, when it is considered that the main distinction between the terms 'intention' and 'consequence' is temporal (i.e. intention implies prior planning and consequence implies successive happening), these different terms might seem to lose their particular relevance in reference to the foreknowing God. These terms, however, are being used to express non-temporal 'priority' or importance within God's creative purposes. Under these circumstances 'intention' implies ultimate significance and 'consequence' entails no ultimate significance.

<sup>72</sup> This term is being used to express non-temporal priority within the order of God's creative purposes.

<sup>73</sup> That sin and evil are a 'consequence', however, does not necessarily suggest that sin and evil couldn't become incorporated into God's creative purpose and used to develop the right relationship between God and his creation in the atonement. As it is written in Matthew 5.45, "for [your Father in heaven] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good". What the term 'consequence' suggests, however, is that they should not be understood as ultimately being caused by God for the ends of the atonement. Moreover, they should be considered as being caused by creation and then 'consequently' confronted through the means of the atonement, in which God becomes triumphant over sin and evil.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Plantinga in Van Inwagen, 2004, pp11-13.

be compatible with the denial of a monist account of the relationship between evil and God's creative purposes. One of the main distinctions that separates this position from the monist position becomes apparent when there is a consideration of the place of 'evil', 'the creation of the world' and 'the atonement' in God's creative purposes. Consider the following two orders:

1. If, on the one hand, a) the atonement is understood as God's response to evil, and b) evil is understood as an inevitable consequence of God's creating this particular world, then c) the atonement is presented as an event intended to deliver creation from evil and bring about the right relationship between God and creation. Consequently, the creation of this particular world takes primacy over the atonement (in the ordering of God's creative purposes<sup>75</sup>).
2. If, on the other hand, as Plantinga would appear to argue in his article 'O Felix Culpa', a) evil is understood as purposefully fulfilling a condition for the "good-making feature"<sup>76</sup> of the atonement, and b) this particular world is presented as the ground from which the required evil can arise, then c) creation is given the purpose of producing evil so that the atonement can take place. Consequently, God's atoning the fallen world is given primacy over God's creating this particular world (in the ordering of God's creative purposes<sup>77</sup>).<sup>78</sup>

Although this present world might be consumed by sin and evil, this does not necessarily imply that God willed this part of creation's existence in order to bring about some 'good making feature', such as the atonement. It is possible and seemingly much more compatible with Scripture for sin and evil to be understood as an unwilled consequence of God's decision to create this particular world. God's

---

<sup>75</sup> I.e. the creation of this particular world is of primary importance in the order of divine intentionality – evil is the unwilled consequence of God's desire to create this particular world – the atonement is the event that deals with the unwilled consequence of evil.

<sup>76</sup> Plantinga in Van Inwagen, 2004, p7.

<sup>77</sup> I.e. the atonement itself is of primary importance in the order of divine intentionality – evil fulfils a condition that is needed for the goal of the atonement – creation provides a situation in which the required evil can develop.

<sup>78</sup> As Kevin Diller also argues, "[Plantinga's] *Felix Culpa* view treats the cost of atonement as an end rather than a means, elevating the action of suffering love over God's purpose and goal of right relationship between God and creatures. (Cf. Diller, 2008, p97)

opposition to sin and evil is made manifest in the fact that God sent his Son to suffer and die on the cross not as a self-glorifying end (not that it wasn't glorifying) but as a genuine means of redeeming his particular creation from its sinful existence. If this is the case, however, then the question arises as to what is so significant about this present sinful existence that it led the omnipotent God to sacrifice (temporarily) the possibility of initially creating the world to exist in a sin-and-evil-less state?

The present state of creation, as it is consumed by wrongdoing and 'contra-causality', could be described as a kind of a cocooned existence: it is a temporal and short-term state of affairs that is enslaved but yet also preserved. Creatures exist in this cocooned state for reasons that, whilst their vision is constrained by such a state, can only be guessed at. This does not mean, however, that creatures cannot know that these reasons are good reasons. With the knowledge that such reasons have been willed by the creator God, creatures can entrust them to be purposeful. Furthermore, given the revelation that the depravity and 'contra-causality' which enslave creation have no perpetuity, creatures do not need to find themselves overburdened with a concern for that short-term state of affairs which constitutes the present. As a caterpillar exists in its cocooned existence only temporarily, so creation only exists in its imprisoned state in the short-term. Creation should, therefore, live out its present existence in anticipation of the new life that awaits it. It is this new long-term life rather than the present short-term life for which humanity has been created. Such an account, however, raises the question as to why God did not choose to create the world to exist in this new long-term life from the outset i.e. without any prior unsatisfactory stages?

If one holds that the omniscient God does all things purposefully then one must also trust that there is something to be achieved by creation's existing in a cocooned state – a purpose that is, for example, of the utmost eschatological significance. What this achievement might be, however, can again only be guessed at. Such guesswork, however, is not necessarily to be considered a useless discipline. It is extremely significant when trying to confront, by way of counter-example, some of the atheistic philosophies that challenge and attempt to undermine the mission of the Christian Church. Plantinga clearly sees this need and it is perhaps for this reason that he is so ready to engage in this type of guesswork, which generally serves an apologetic purpose. When engaging in such a discipline, however, it is necessary to avoid suggestions that unintentionally conflict with the message and thrust of the

Gospel (even if such suggestions are able to develop a *seemingly* less confusing and more constructive/productive theory).

The cocoon effect means that creatures have no capacity to know God's rationale apart from the knowledge that has been given to them through special revelation. This special revelation, which is recognised to be true revelation through the power of the Holy Spirit, not only reveals God's creative purposes in Christ<sup>79</sup> but also reveals to creatures the limits of their capacity for theological speculation – in other words, it reveals to creatures their incapacity to know God apart from Scripture. Any attempt to do so is to engage in potentially anthropomorphic forms of 'natural theology'. This is a risk that Plantinga runs in over-emphasising the status and ultimate significance of creation's present 'cocooned' state e.g. when he portrays the present 'contra-causal' 'freedom' of this world as genuine freedom. By attempting to focus on how this world already exhibits its most significant qualities as the best of all possible worlds,<sup>80</sup> Plantinga inevitably risks incorporating the 'contra-causal' 'freedom'<sup>81</sup> and wrongdoing of this present world into the divine intentionality.<sup>82</sup>

#### 4. *The Long-Term State of Affairs*

What is the problem with Plantinga's placing too much emphasis on the significance of this present existence in his approach to theodicy? Should this present state of affairs be considered as the best of all possible worlds in itself or should it be considered as the best of all possible worlds when together with its ultimate fulfilment?

---

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Eph. 8-10.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Plantinga, 1974, p168 and his article 'O Felix Culpa' in Van Inwagen, 2004, p12.

<sup>81</sup> This 'contra-causal' 'freedom' is a 'freedom' apart from God, which (because it is apart from God) will inevitably be misused and lead to wrongdoing. As Scripture would want to suggest, the only freedom is freedom under God, which is dependent upon the intervening (and hence causal) work of Christ and the Spirit cf. Lk. 4.18; Jn. 8.32-36; Rom. 6.6-7, 6.18-22, 8.1-3. 8.20-21; 1 Cor. 7.21-22; 2 Cor. 3.17; Gal. 5.1, 5.13-14; Eph. 3.12; 2 Pet. 2.16-19.

<sup>82</sup> Again, Plantinga would want to consider the present creation and the new creation as the same world. As such, they are both, together, the best of all possible worlds. However, if Plantinga wants to avoid undermining the fallen creation's need for redemption and reconciliation (that will lead to its fulfilment), it would have been beneficial for him to show more eschatological focus. In other words, draw on how creation presently exists in anticipation of a transformation that will change (for the better) many of the features that this world presently exhibits, e.g. its unrighteousness and self-oriented desires.

Plantinga writes, “I believe, that God not only has created a world that is very good, but that there aren’t any conditions under which he would have created a world that is less than very good.”<sup>83</sup>

Consider the mother who temporarily places a harsh limit on the kinds of food she gives her child in order to achieve some greater good, such as delivering her child from pathological obesity. As a result the child ends up developing hunger pangs, which the mother knew would be the inevitable consequence of subjecting her child to temporary constraints on food intake. In this state of affairs it is not ‘very good’ that the mother does something (or does not do something) that would lead her child to suffer from hunger. However, she knows that subjecting her child to such an existence will only be temporary and in so doing will save her child from becoming seriously ill. As such the short-term state of affairs of the child suffering from hunger will be justified by the long-term state of affairs of the child becoming healthy. If, however, there were no anticipated long-term state of affairs and the mother unendingly subjected her child to hunger, then it would be much harder to justify the mother’s actions. Furthermore, any attempt to do so would look very different from those attempts that take into account the possibility of a long-term state of affairs. For example, without the possible long-term benefits, a person might suggest that the mother is justified in withholding food from her child in order to make the child’s hunger induce a greater sense of appreciation for the limited food that the child does receive. As a result, the child’s hunger would also induce a much greater feeling of gratitude for the mother when she does graciously provide them with food.

When Plantinga develops his theodicy he does not seem to take into sufficient account the possibility of a future long-term state of affairs.<sup>84</sup> As such his *Felix Culpa* theodicy and free-will defense would seem to be developed out of a much greater emphasis on the present state of affairs than the long-term. Although these two approaches provide highly legitimate philosophical accounts, especially when taken

---

<sup>83</sup> Plantinga in Van Inwagen, 2004, p8.

<sup>84</sup> It is not being suggested here that Plantinga does not hold there to be a long-term state of affairs. In fact, it would seem that in his *Felix Culpa* approach it is his intention to imply that the good relationship that results from the atonement is of eternal significance. What is being suggested here, however, is that the possibility of an eternal state of affairs could have played a much more significant part in his thought and, perhaps, could have been used to shed greater light on some of the apparent problems that the world faces in its present situation.

together,<sup>85</sup> by placing insufficient emphasis on the possibility of a long-term state of affairs they ultimately become less significant as specifically *Christian* approaches (that is, as the outworking of the ‘Christian epistemic base’, which Plantinga advocates so strongly in his article ‘Advice to Christian Philosophers’, for example<sup>86</sup>).

In Scripture this present state of affairs, as it is consumed by sin and evil, is not presented as the long-term state of affairs (or as a desired end in God’s creative purposes). It is portrayed as a short-term state of affairs that should be lived out in hope and anticipation of the new and everlasting state of affairs that begins after death.<sup>87</sup> If Plantinga were more willing to engage with this and look ‘outside the box’ of this present world, his theodicy might have looked very different. It might have come across as being less focused on how this world presently finds fulfilment as the best of all possible worlds and more concerned with asking how this ‘best of all possible worlds’ exists in anticipation of its ultimate fulfilment as the new creation.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, it might have been less oriented towards asking how the world’s present ‘freedom’ defines what it means to be significantly free<sup>89</sup>, and more concerned with how the world’s present freedom exhibits a quality that might ultimately be able to contribute to the new lives for which we have been created (lived out as ‘slaves to righteousness’ - in Christ, by the Spirit and in obedience to the Father). When taking a specifically *Christian* approach to apologetics one should be concerned primarily with how this present world provides the right set of circumstances out of which God can bring about the consummation of his creative purposes and achieve the right relationship with his creation.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Both these approaches greatly compliment each other and it would be very interesting if Plantinga had developed a piece of work that brought these two approaches into discussion. For example, if Plantinga’s Felix Culpa argument had not made in isolation, but as a further support to consider why God might have given creatures free-will (its leading to the good of the atonement). Such a compounding of his accounts would still, however, be problematic and would still not take into significant enough account the long-term state of affairs.

<sup>86</sup> Plantinga, 1984.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Rom. 6.5-11.

<sup>88</sup> When Plantinga refers to this world as the best of all possible worlds he will have almost certainly been assuming that people would take this to mean the best of all possible worlds *prior to the new creation*. If this is the case, however, then it needs to be asked why this possibility does not seem to shape and influence, for example, his account of the free will defense.

<sup>89</sup> Plantinga, 1974, p166-167.

<sup>90</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that Plantinga’s approach is incompatible with an eschatological view of the Christian faith. Plantinga would, for example, want to suggest that the outworkings of our present lives have eschatological significance. If, however, Plantinga really wanted to emphasise this point he should have perhaps made this a more central part of his argument. In so doing his argument might have looked very different.

One of the key problems with attempting to justify the ultimate goodness of this present state of affairs is that it can end up undermining creation's need for redemption. For example, when Plantinga emphasises the significance of creation's present 'freedom' he would at times seem to be doing so at the expense of creation's future freedom 'in Christ'. This radically contrasts with the position of Barth who would seem to be so orientated towards emphasising the significance of creatures' future freedom that he tends to undermine the present 'freedom' of creatures.<sup>91</sup> Whereas, Plantinga wants to suggest that creation is free because it can and does perform wrong actions, Barth would not want to suggest that creation is not free if it is locked into a situation that leads to the (foreknown) inevitable performance of actions that are wrong.<sup>92</sup>

For Barth, when creatures discover their true and essential freedom in Christ, by the Spirit in obedience to the Father, they no longer live by a desire for wrongdoing but by the grace of God.<sup>93</sup> When entering into this new life, a person's desires are awakened and become so defined by a love for God and neighbour that any wrong actions that they might previously have desired become senseless and cease to be temptation. It is by living a life consumed with this love that a person is freely able to become a 'slave to righteousness'.<sup>94</sup> From this more Pauline (and Barthian) perspective, creatures are not portrayed as being created for unrighteousness, as Plantinga would seem to suggest, but for righteousness. Whereas Plantinga's position might seem to make more sense to the world in its present situation, Barth's position finds much more accord with Scripture and its central affirmation that creation is in radical need of redemption from its present condition.

Although, this thesis could focus exclusively on a discussion of Plantinga and his understanding of evil, space does not allow for this if there is to be significant discussion of Barth. As such, this brief discussion on Plantinga serves as an extended prolegomenon to a discussion of Barth's position. Many of the issues and problems raised in this first section will now be considered in more detail by focusing on how Barth deals with such problems.

The main factor that will be considered to divide these two contrasting thinkers is, as briefly noted in the introduction, Plantinga's inclination towards a more

---

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Barth, CD III.2, pp74, 194-7, 306 and CD IV.1, p43, 101, 745.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Rom. 7.14-20, 8.20-21.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Barth, CD III.1, pp265-266.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Gal. 4.14.

monist understanding with respect to the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes in contrast to Barth's inclination towards a more dualist understanding. Consequently, Plantinga would seem to portray sin and evil and that which leads to wrongdoing as a desired part of God's creative purposes, whereas Barth portrays them as nothing less than a menace and enemy to God and his creative purposes. Furthermore, it is this factor that has led to their two understandings of freedom: Plantinga's understanding of 'freedom' in terms of being "slaves to sin... [and] free from the control of righteousness" (Rom. 6.20) and Barth's understanding of freedom as "free from sin and... slaves to righteousness" (Rom. 6.18).

Before moving onto a discussion of Barth there is perhaps one last point of clarification that should be reiterated with respect to Plantinga. Although it has been argued that Plantinga holds to a monist understanding of the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes, this does not imply that he holds to a monist understanding of the relationship between sin and evil and God. Although Plantinga might argue that sin and evil are an intended element in God's creative purposes, he does not argue that sin and evil are a part of God. Moreover, he argues that they are a consequent part of the particular creation he chose to create. In this respect Plantinga is quite similar to Barth and perhaps leans more towards a dualist account of God's goodness in relation to sin and evil. Where Barth and Plantinga differ, however, is with respect to their understandings of the relationship between sin and evil in God's creative purposes. Whereas Plantinga holds sin and evil to retain precedence within God's creative purposes, Barth, we shall suggest, holds them to be an inevitable consequence that God does not directly will, but which he is able consequently to incorporate into his creative purposes. A notable feature of Barth's account, in comparison with Plantinga's, is that at each and every turn he seeks to uphold a strong understanding of God's sovereignty while refusing to make sin and evil an element in God's creative purposes. To develop a strong Christian account of the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes, the sovereignty of God needs to be upheld whilst also keeping sin and evil separate from God. By failing to sustain this separation between sin and evil and God's ultimate purposes Plantinga's approach to theodicy is ultimately inadequate as a specifically *Christian* account.



### III. Karl Barth's Dualist Account of the Relationship Between Sin and Evil and God's Creative Purposes

#### 1. Is Barth's account of *Das Nichtige*, "Halfway Towards a Manichean Dualism"? <sup>95</sup>

Karl Barth's interpretation of sin and evil as an impossible possibility seeks to address some of the difficulties and paradoxes that arise in his understanding of evil as *das Nichtige*. On the one hand, Barth argues that sin and evil - "[confirm] the real existence of nothingness"<sup>96</sup>; are "actual"<sup>97</sup>, "something"<sup>98</sup> and "real"<sup>99</sup>; are "not nothing or non-existent"<sup>100</sup>; are "an imprisoning power"<sup>101</sup>; and, furthermore, have their "own ponderable *reality*"<sup>102</sup>. On the other hand, they are "that which is not, that which is empty, which is necessarily nothing"<sup>103</sup>; "the non-existent"<sup>104</sup>; "that which God did not will";<sup>105</sup> and, of course, *das Nichtige* (nothingness or 'that which is not'). These apparent paradoxes develop when Barth refuses to adhere either to a monist understanding, which considers sin and evil as a desired created reality, or to some form of dualism, which undermines the sovereignty of God. One could argue, that by refusing to adhere either to monism or dualism Barth is inevitably going to end up being illogical or inconsistent. This, however, is not the case and his rationale will hopefully become clear when I consider the context in which Barth uses such terms as, 'real', 'actual', 'existent' etc. Before doing this, however, it would be significant to consider Hick's misinterpretation of Barth as a theologian bordering on Manichean dualism.

When Barth refers to *das Nichtige* as something existent, something real etc. it might seem that he is bordering on some form of Manichean dualism. John Hick makes this accusation of him in his book *Evil and the God of Love* when he suggests

---

<sup>95</sup> Hick, 1977, p193.

<sup>96</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p352.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p74.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p296.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p352.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p349.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p356.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p76, (emphasis mine).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p366.

that Barth's understanding of *das Nichtige* "is halfway towards a Manichean dualism."<sup>106</sup> By looking solely at some of the language that Barth uses to describe *das Nichtige*, out of context, it could be argued that Hick's accusation has a certain amount of gravity. However, when this language is understood in its proper context there is much more to what Barth is suggesting. By considering this further it will hopefully become clear that Barth is neither a theologian bordering on the heresy of Manichean dualism nor halfway towards it (whatever this means?). Moreover, Barth has developed an understanding that affirms both the full sovereignty of God and the genuinely malevolent nature of sin and evil. Before considering his position further, however, it will be useful to consider Hick's accusation in its proper context. Hick writes,

Barth's argument – that in creating, God chooses good and rejects evil, which henceforth has the character of being denied and opposed by God – would be in order if this were a human choice. But when applied to the Godhead arguments become highly questionable. It requires the premise that God in creating, must choose between realities which already stand in some way before him, seeking his election. But such a premise ignores, and by implication denies, the distinctively Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. By postulating a previously existing situation within which God acts... Barth is halfway towards a Manichean dualism.<sup>107</sup>

Hick's accusation that Barth denies the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is a misunderstanding that is quite likely generated by Hick's two-fold typology into two kinds, namely, monist and dualist.<sup>108</sup> Barth holds, in no uncertain terms, that God creates *ex nihilo*. This particular act of creation is brought about, for Barth, "by [God] distinguishing that which He willed from that which he did not will, and giving [creation] existence on the basis of that distinction. To that divine distinction it owes the fact that it is. And to that same distinction it owes the fact that it can continue to

---

<sup>106</sup> Hick, 1977, p193.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Hick argues for a two-fold typology of Christian theodicies, namely, those which offer monist accounts of good and evil and those which offer a dualist account.

be.”<sup>109</sup> When Barth refers to “nothingness” as the reality out of which God creates, he is not referring to it in a manner that undermines the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. For Barth, *das Nichtige* truly is both nothingness and the non-existent. As Nicolas Wolterstorff writes on Barth,

Before God created – if we may speak of “before” – before God created, there was God and God alone. Nothing else, not anything else... That is, there *were no other* things than God. If things other than God were to exist they must be brought forth from not being. The only one who can do that is God – by creating. Creation is bringing things forth from the abyss of non-being.<sup>110</sup>

For Barth, however, this understanding of *das Nichtige* does not necessarily entail that ‘nothingness’ or *das Nichtige* does not exist in its own manner. *Das Nichtige* exists in its non-existence. As Wolterstorff writes further on Barth,

For *Das Nichtige* is not non-being as such. Non-being is, precisely, not anything; whereas *das Nichtige* is something: there is *das Nichtige*. Yet it’s not the case that before God creates there is God *and something else* – namely, *das Nichtige*. Before God creates there is God and not anything else.<sup>111</sup>

By using such terms as ‘real’, ‘actual’, etc. to refer to *das Nichtige* Barth is affirming that there *really* was a time<sup>112</sup> when creation did not exist but that this *reality* was overcome when God brought creation into existence.<sup>113</sup> By distinguishing between the reality of *das Nichtige* (when creation was not) and the reality of creation (when creation was), Barth is able to affirm that creation is not eternal and, therefore, did not always exist but was brought into existence *ex nihilo* in accordance with the free will of God.

---

<sup>109</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p73.

<sup>110</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p587.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> This thesis will be using words such as ‘prior’ and ‘before’ which refer to a single system of time and so a degree of analogy must come into play here.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p73.

Although Barth might want to affirm the reality of *das Nichtige* in one sense, Barth would also want to make it clear, however, that *das Nichtige* does not have its own independent reality. Its reality is, moreover, dependent upon God's will to create through his confrontation of and victory over the non-existent. Following this triumph, *das Nichtige* finds its reality as the shadow of creation<sup>114</sup>. If God had not chosen to bring creation into existence there would have been no shadow to fall behind creation and the only thing that would have existed would have been, as Wolterstorff writes on Barth, 'God and God alone', 'Nothing else, not anything else.'<sup>115</sup> When God chose to create something else apart from him, he did so in opposition to what would have eternally been the 'unrealised nothing else'. Under these circumstances creation, as 'that which God willed for', is distinguished from *das Nichtige*, as 'that which he did not will for'. Furthermore, because God willed for creation over *das Nichtige*, for Barth, creation should be understood in positive terms and associated with what is good. *Das Nichtige*, on the other hand, is uncreated and needs to be understood in malevolent terms and can only be associated with what is evil.

If Barth had not drawn the distinction between the reality of *das Nichtige* and the reality of creation, when holding to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, he would have had to affirm the eternity of creation and adhere to some form of monism.<sup>116</sup> In so doing he would have denied the fundamental distinction between God and creation and affirmed creation to have been begotten from God - 'out of God'. If there were no non-existent existence of *das Nichtige* or *nihil* apart from God, as the shadow of creation, then there could be no *nihil* out of which God could have created. This would mean that creation would need to be understood as begotten from God. Unless, of course, one chose to hold to some form of dualism and argued that creation was 'out of something'. This understanding, however, is also highly problematic because

---

<sup>114</sup> As will be considered in more detail later, following God's triumph over sin and evil, *das Nichtige* also finds reality within the fallen creation as it exists in the shadow of the new creation. The shadow metaphor finds significant accordance with Scripture Cf. 1 Chr. 29.15, Job 8.9, 10.21, Ps. 17.8, 23.4, 36.7, 57.1, 63.7, 91.1, 144.4, Eccl. 6.12, Isa. 59.9, Mt. 4.16, Lk. 1.79, Heb. 10.1.

<sup>115</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p587. It should perhaps be noted that the 'nothing else' has always *existed* with God in its non-existence but that this non-existence is only *realised* when God brings creation into existence. In other words, the 'nothing else' did not develop a newfound existence alongside creation, but only developed the realisation of its non-existent existence.

<sup>116</sup> It is not being implied here that there was a time when nothing else existed apart from God and then there was a time when all that existed apart from God was creation. God should not be understood as *creating in* time, but as *creating* time and, therefore, this account should not be understood temporally. If time did exist prior to creation and apart from God, then creation could not be understood as being 'out of nothing' but 'out of time'.

it denies the full sovereignty of God and places preconditions and limitations on God's creative activity. Furthermore, it undermines the possibility of God being able to engage in an act of creation at all because, as Jürgen Moltmann shows by drawing on the distinction between 'creating' (*bara*) and 'making' (*asah*): "Creation is something absolutely new. It is neither actually or potentially inherent or present in something else... 'Making' [on the other hand] is the term for the purposeful 'manufacture' of a work, in which something is given its particular character and aptitude."<sup>117</sup>

When affirming that there really was a 'time', prior to creation, when nothing existed apart from God, Barth is in no way interpreting the 'nothing' as a 'something'. He holds in no uncertain terms that before creation, there really was nothing else apart from God; there was God and no-thing. This reality of 'nothing else apart from God' is, for Barth, the reality of *das Nichtige*; it is the non-existent reality that only exists as the shadow of the existent creation (and, as shall be discussed later, as the shadow of the new creation<sup>118</sup>). As such, it is only through creation that *das Nichtige* is realised as a reality i.e. with relation to creation. As Wolterstorff writes, "*Das Nichtige*...comes about as the inevitable *accompaniment* of God's bringing forth creatures."<sup>119</sup> The difficulty with this understanding, however, is that it might seem to conflict with the previous assertion that there needs to be a *nihil* out of which God could create.

The need to understand that there is a *nihil* out of which God creates is for the purpose of affirming both the full sovereignty of God and the distinction that lies between him and his creation. When God originally created, it was not a case of him needing *nihil* out of which to create but, moreover, that there was *nihil* (nothing else apart from God) out of which he created. It is this assertion that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* seeks to affirm when it presents *nihil* in real terms. Presenting *nihil* in such 'real' terms, however, is dependent upon there being a creation that is able to

---

<sup>117</sup> Moltmann, 1985, p73 and cf. Irenaeus, accessed 2008, 4.20.1.

<sup>118</sup> *Das Nichtige* only exists in the shadow of a next stage in God's creative purposes. Thus when God brings about the final stage and consummation of his creative purposes, *das Nichtige* is brought to an end.

<sup>119</sup> As Wolterstorff describes through the analogy of a dissonance in a Bach fugue - "Barth wants nothing to do with any of the multitude of theories which say that those phenomena which he, Barth, identifies as sins and evils, are not really evil but merely "negative aspects" of human existence – like the dissonance in a Bach fugue which, if heard all by themselves, are repulsive, but which, when heard within the context of the whole, are seen to contribute indispensably to the goodness of the whole. It's not the case that reality is good through and through. There is evil in it: that which is in opposition to God and to which God is therefore in opposition." (Wolterstorff, 1996, p587.)

look back in retrospect at the shadow from whence it came. If there were no creation, then there would also be no retrospect and, therefore, no possibility of considering *nihil* or *das Nichtige* in real terms. For this reason, any realisation of *nihil* is *dependent* upon there being the perspective of creation.

With all this complication, the question might arise as to why there is a need to consider *nihil* or *das Nichtige* in real terms? Would it not be easier simply to suggest that God has existed for all eternity and then ‘when’ he chose to create, he existed with creation? This position is no different from Barth’s and it is more than likely that Barth would have agreed that this simpler understanding, interpreted correctly, would be ideal. However, by bringing the term ‘nothing’ (or one of its many forms) into the equation and considering it in real terms, for example, when creation is understood as ‘out of nothing’, Barth and his predecessors avoid the risks of monism or dualism. This approach appears to have been successful in achieving this task. However, it can only continue to be successful if ‘nothing’ is merely being understood in terms that suggest existence and not as something that actually exists. This is the mistake that many critics make when considering Barth’s understanding of *das Nichtige*. For Barth, nothing is not something disguised under the pseudonym of nothing. Rather, it really denotes no-thing.

If it were the case that Barth had chosen to adhere to a monist understanding and misinterpret creation as being begotten from God, Barth would have also needed to deny the reality of evil as something truly negative, that is, as an opponent to both God and his creation, in favour of considering it in positive terms as a misconceived good.<sup>120</sup> By considering evil and *das Nichtige* in real terms as a reality separate from God, Barth does not undermine the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* but affirms it over and against a variety of monist theories that really would undermine this doctrine by affirming that creation is ‘out of God’. In his assertion that evil is a very real threat against God’s creation Barth is also making it clear that God takes sin and evil seriously. If this assertion is not made and evil is not taken seriously, a mockery is made of God’s decision to send his Son to suffer and die in order to overcome this threat. For Barth, the standpoint from which sin and evil must be understood is the revelation of its confrontation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When sin and evil are understood from this perspective all attempts to consider them as

---

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p305, 307, 310, 315, 333, 352 and cf. Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good*, chap. 1, (accessed 2008).

anything other than the negation of God's will and opponent to his creative purposes can only be regarded as inadequate and trivialising evil. Barth writes,

But nothingness is neither God nor His creatures. But it would be foolhardy to rush to the conclusion that it is therefore nothing, i.e., that it does not exist. God takes it into account. He is concerned with it. He strives against it, resists and overcomes it. If God's reality and revelation are known in his presence and action in Jesus Christ, he is also known as the god who is confronted by nothingness, for whom it constitutes a problem, who takes it seriously, who does not deal with it incidentally but in the fullness of the glory of His deity, who is not engaged indirectly or mediately but with his whole being, involving Himself to the utmost. If we accept this we cannot argue that because it has nothing in common with God and His creature nothingness is nothing, i.e., it does not exist. That which confronts God in this way, and is seriously treated by Him, is surely not nothing or non-existent.<sup>121</sup>

To come to a clearer understanding of what Barth is trying to do here and to challenge further the accusation that he is in danger of developing some form of Manichean dualism it is important to consider what precisely is being argued when he refers to *das Nichtige* as something 'real'. When he uses this term, for example, to suggest that there is "real evil and real death as well as real sin... real devil with his legions, and a real hell"<sup>122</sup>, he is not using it in the same respect as he does when referring to the reality of God and creation. Relative to God and creation, *das Nichtige* is, for Barth, 'that which is not'. This does not necessarily mean, however, as Barth wants to emphasise, that *das Nichtige* does not retain some form of relative reality. By using the term 'real' to refer to *das Nichtige* he is using it to imply an "opposition to the totality of God's creation."<sup>123</sup> As such, just as it is highly problematic to deny that there is 'something' (*das Nichtige*) in opposition to the totality of God's creation, it is also problematic to deny that *das Nichtige* is real in a

---

<sup>121</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p349.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p310.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

certain respect. If *das Nichtige* is not considered to have its own peculiar form of being it becomes very difficult to consider there *to be* an object of jealousy, wrath and judgement.<sup>124</sup> When God creates something he does so in opposition to the nothingness (*das Nichtige*) that exists with an “ontic peculiarity”<sup>125</sup> as the shadow of God’s creation. For Barth, when God creates he does so ‘out of nothing’ and, therefore, in this creative act he distinguishes creation from the non-existent reality of *das Nichtige*. Barth writes,

That nothingness has the form of evil and death as well as sin shows us that it is what it is not only morally but physically and totally. It is the comprehensive negation of the creature and its nature. And as such it is a power which, though unsolicited and uninvited, is superior, like evil and death, to all the forces which the creature can oppose to it. As negation nothingness has its own dynamic, the dynamic of damage and destruction with which the creature cannot cope.<sup>126</sup>

Affirming the negativity of *das Nichtige*, in relation to the positivity of creation, is very important to Barth.<sup>127</sup> He holds that *das Nichtige* can only be realised as an actuality because it is the negation of the positive reality of God and his creation. If there were no existent reality of ‘that which is’ (God and creation), then there could be no negative reality of ‘that which is not’ (*das Nichtige*). Furthermore, without the positive action of God raising creation out of *das Nichtige* there would be no negative action of creation being subsumed by the sphere of *das Nichtige*.<sup>128</sup> It is only through God’s positive actions, such as creation and redemption, that there can be the possibility of negative actions, as the perspective inverse of the positive actions

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p356.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p310.

<sup>127</sup> This position of Barth’s follows on in the tradition of Augustine, who held that everything that God created and gave existence to is good. Like Augustine, Barth was keen to undermine the various Platonist, Gnostic and Manichaean philosophies that denied the reality and/or goodness of particulars (*kosmos aisthetos* – the phenomenal realm of things that do change) in favour of affirming the sole reality and/or goodness of universals (*kosmos noetos* – the noumenal realm of things that do not change). By affirming the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* both Barth and Augustine could affirm the reality of particulars as a reality distinct from God but yet purposefully created by him. If God creates out of nothing, it is both through him and for him that all things are created. There is much to Barth’s thought that follows on in the tradition of Augustine. This will be looked at further and discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p74.



e.g. annihilation as the inverse of creation. For Barth, when God creates *ex nihilo* he brings about a meaningful and positive change. What this implies is that total nothingness, which only exists as the shadow of this positive change, needs to be understood in negative terms. It also implies that creation and *das Nichtige* stand at opposite poles and so the goodness of creation implies the evil on *das Nichtige*. As such, the reality of *das Nichtige* finds adequate description, as Barth writes, “by defining it as the possibility which God in his eternal decree rejected and therefore did not and does not will, which has and can have its actuality in that sense.”<sup>129</sup>

Barth is unwilling to deny that *das Nichtige* and evil are a reality. He writes, “Nothingness rejoices when it notices that it is not noticed.”<sup>130</sup> He is also, however, unwilling to advocate any form of Manichean dualism, which would suggest that *das Nichtige* is a real thing in the same manner as God and creation are real things. He wants to affirm that “there is a positive as well as a negative aspect of creation and creaturely occurrence.”<sup>131</sup> If God’s creative activity is considered from its positive aspect, on the one hand, creation is understood as the process whereby God brings creation out of *das Nichtige* and then, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the process whereby he brings about the renewal of creation into its final and perfect consummation. If, on the other hand, it is considered from its negative aspect, as the inverse of God’s positive action, Barth writes, “creation is as it were on the frontier of nothingness and orientated towards it.”<sup>132</sup> From the negative aspect, creation is moving from createdness towards annihilation; *das Nichtige* is pulling creation away from its consummation. This does not, however, mean that creation has to concern itself with this negative aspect because, as Barth writes, “The true nothingness is that which brought Jesus Christ to the cross, and that which he defeated there.”<sup>133</sup>

As his beloved creation, God is always preserving and upholding it, pulling it away from the menace of *das Nichtige* in a positive direction towards its ultimate consummation. God wills to be the creator and as such, wills not to be the annihilator. This, however, does not mean that he is not free to become the annihilator. What it means is that in the person of Jesus Christ he has revealed himself as the loving

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p526.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. p296.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. p296.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p305.

Father and ever-persevering Shepherd and, in the utmost respect, as a God who does not will for the annihilation of creation.<sup>134</sup> He is a God that creates with progressive purpose and not with a penchant for surrender or resignation. As Barth writes, “[God’s] will for His creature is liberation for a life in fellowship with himself, because he wills to be known and praised by the creature as its liberator and because he thus wills its continuation and not its destruction.”<sup>135</sup>

When God creates, he creates with the purpose of embracing his creation into a new and eternal life of *koinonia* with him. His creative purposes for his creatures and the world they inhabit, are not ones of annihilation, but ones for transformation and redemption. The fulfilment of his creative purposes is not characterised by surrender and defeat, as the former would imply, but is rooted in his loving determination and unswerving perseverance for his creation. The final consummation of God’s creative purposes, however, has not yet been brought about. God is still working to bring about the new creation through his Son Jesus Christ in accordance with the power of the Holy Spirit who, as Irenaeus writes, are the two hands of the Father “by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things.”<sup>136</sup> Barth writes,

“[A]ccording to the work and revelation of God in Jesus Christ it is not at all the will of God to abandon the creature in its proximity to the non-existent, in its conflict with chaos; to withdraw to the secure height of His own remoteness from contradiction, and then (in consideration perhaps of its greater or lesser merit) to grant or not to grant it His assistance, preserving or not preserving it in its need. On the contrary, from all eternity – that is, in the eternal counsel of His grace as it is effective and revealed in Jesus Christ – His merciful will was to take up the cause of the creature against the non-existent, not from the safe height of a supreme world-governor, but in the closest possible proximity, with the greatest possible directness, i.e., Himself to become a creature. He placed himself within the contradiction. He drew to himself and bore away the whole enmity and problem and power of the non-existent... This is the eternal will of God fulfilled

---

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Wolterstorff, 1996, p595.

<sup>135</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p290.

<sup>136</sup> Irenaeus, accessed 2008, 4.20.1.

and accomplished once and for all in time in Jesus Christ. And in the light of this will and work we have to regard the question of the *conservatio* of the creature as one which has already been decided.”<sup>137</sup>

Although the final consummation has not yet come about and therefore has not yet been realised this does not mean that it cannot be known. It is the present state of the Christian believer to have some knowledge of the truth that awaits it, such that they can live by the faith and hope that this knowledge entails; to know that the day will come when Christ’s defeat of the sin and evil on the cross will be fully realised. On this day creation will enter into the kingdom of God and will see with unimaginable clarity the creation that it has been created to become. Until this day, however, the Christian can only live by and find vision through the message that has been given to them in the Gospel and made true to them through the Spirit. Under these circumstances, the Gospel is not the glasses, which clarify a person’s obscured vision, but, moreover, the stick of a blind person, which provides the blind person with some feeling of the way that lies ahead of them.

When considering Barth’s seemingly paradoxical understanding of *das Nichtige* as ‘something’ that is ‘very real’, it is easy to see why such thinkers as Hick consider him to be bordering on some form of Manichaeism. This, however, is not the case. Barth would want to acknowledge that his account, as with all Christian accounts, is analogical. By using the conceptuality of *das Nichtige*, Barth was able to develop a strong account of creation *ex nihilo* that, on the one hand, is able to deny any monist account that considers creation to have been begotten from God and, on the other hand any Manichean dualist accounts that undermine the sovereignty of God. He is also able to provide a formidable account of the relationship between sin and evil in God’s creative purposes, which affirms the reality of sin and evil both as an adversary to God’s creative purposes and as something over which God retains full sovereignty. However, although Barth’s use of language in this context serves to articulate some fundamental points it still has a paradoxical element and is not able to answer all the questions that confront it, nor does it seek to. The creature’s incapacity

---

<sup>137</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, pp78-79.

to understand sin and evil fully is not a problem for Barth, but a reality that the creature should readily accept.

What Barth seeks to affirm is Scripture's presentation of sin and evil as something that exists temporarily. Sin and evil are a real adversary to God and one that he ultimately overcomes through the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In his discussion of *das Nichtige* and references to it Barth is able to provide an analogical account that strongly asserts Scripture's message concerning the relationship between sin and evil and God's creative purposes. In so doing he adheres neither to a form of monism on the one hand nor Manichean dualism on the other and to the extent that his concept of *das Nichtige* is indeed coherent, is successful in the task he sets himself.

## 2. How Could *Das Nichtige* Have a Negative Effect Over Creation?

### 2.1 *In the Shadow of the New Creation*

So far it has been discussed how Barth considers *das Nichtige* to be a reality without undermining the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* or adhering to some form of Manichean dualism. The question that now needs to be asked is how Barth sees *das Nichtige* as bringing about sin and evil within creation without holding it to be an eternal ‘lord of darkness’ that is independent from God. If he did consider *das Nichtige* in these terms he would, of course, be advocating some form of Manichean dualism and undermining God’s sovereignty.<sup>138</sup> If, however, Barth does not hold *das Nichtige* to be some independent creator of evil but holds it to be the mere nothingness that God rejected in his initial creative act, it is very difficult to see how it could have any influence over creation. How, in other words, can sin and evil be grounded in or identified with nothingness?

Within Barth’s thought concerning good and evil there is a distinctly dualist aspect between, as Nicolas Wolterstorff writes, “a bright side and a shadow side.”<sup>139</sup> As Wolterstorff goes on to write, “The bright side consists of all the things God brought about by saying Yes to them; these are the creatures. The shadow side consists of all the things God brought about by saying No to them; these are the unactualised possibilities. It is these unactualised possibles, *that which is not*, which menace the creature and thus constitute *das Nichtige*.”<sup>140</sup> What Barth is suggesting, as Wolterstorff understands him, is that “there’s an infinitude of possibilities that God rejected at creation”<sup>141</sup> and these possibilities are recognised by Barth as the shadow side of creation. Wolterstorff then goes on to ask two seemingly obvious questions:

1. “[H]ow [could] God’s rejection of these possibles... bring them about?”<sup>142</sup>
2. “Don’t [the possibles] have to be there already if God is to reject them?”<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Rodin, 1997, p114.

<sup>139</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p589.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

Of course, if Barth held that the rejected possibles were already there, in some form or other, he would have needed to be adhering to some form of dualism, i.e. that there was some other independent lord of evil that either controlled the rejected possibles or, indeed, was the rejected possibles. Although there might be a dualist strand in Barth's thought, he adamantly does not endorse any form of dualism<sup>144</sup> and holds, as Wolterstorff writes, that there was and is no "previously existing creature, nor some entity whose existence was entirely independent of God"<sup>145</sup>. In holding to a dualist understanding but refusing to adhere to any form of dualism, Barth has no option, for Wolterstorff, "but to say that *in* creating, God brought about the rejected possibles."<sup>146</sup> If this were what Barth was doing it would then raise the further question of how *das Nichtige*, or 'the unactualised possibles that constitute *das Nichtige*', could possibly guide creation away from God and bring it into a shadowy existence? Surely this could not happen if what *das Nichtige* denotes were truly nothingness, unactualised and rejected by God because, as Wolterstorff writes, "unactualised possibles are... totally lacking in activity and power."<sup>147</sup>

The answers to these problems will be considered by looking at the interpretation of *das Nichtige* as 'that which is not'. For Barth, sin and evil are that which is not directly brought about by God, that which is not a part of God's creation but that which is, nonetheless, a very serious reality. They exist, he writes, because "God still permits His kingdom not to be seen by us, and to that extent He still permits us to be prey to nothingness".<sup>148</sup> For Barth, sin and evil are fundamentally not a created reality but a permitted reality that comes into existence when God permits his creation to 'be prey' to the alien powers of *das Nichtige*. The problem that would again seem to arise here, however, is that by suggesting an alien power brings about sin and evil, he might again seem to advocate some form of Manichean dualism.

---

<sup>144</sup> Dualism being the view that there are two independent eternal things, such as gods or principles, and that one is good and one is evil. A dualist account, however, does not necessarily imply that there are two independent and eternal *things*, but that there are two independent and eternal aspects that need to be considered. As Barth holds, for example, there is both God and *das Nichtige*, the existent and the non-existent, a thing and no-thing. These two enter into confrontation when God wills to create *something* 'out of' and, therefore, 'over and against' *nothing*. As a result of this confrontation 'nothing' becomes distinguished from God not only in its non-existence but, furthermore, as that which God does not will for. Consequently, as God and what he wills for is good, so *das Nichtige* and what it represents become recognised as evil.

<sup>145</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p597.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. p589.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p367.

It is very difficult to consider an alien power as coming from something that is not an independent creator of evil. For Barth, however, the suggestion that sin and evil are brought about by some alien power does not necessarily imply a Manichean dualism. What it implies is two things: first, that the existence of sin and evil within creation is alien to the creator and the purposes for which his creation has been created and destined; and second, because *das Nichtige* is working against God and his creative purposes they are a negative power, but a power nonetheless. As *nihilum* or *das Nichtige* worked against God when he created *ex nihilo*, so *das Nichtige*, which holds creation in bondage, continues to work against God when he perseveres to bring about creation's transformation, redemption and liberation of his fallen creation into the new creation. The fallen creation, for Barth, exists in the shadow of the new creation and it is this overshadowed existence that continues to portray and realise the God-less reign of *das Nichtige*.

What should perhaps be made clear at this point is that although Barth might hold *das Nichtige* to have been destroyed in Jesus Christ,<sup>149</sup> he also holds that "Nothingness may still have standing and assume significance to the extent that the final revelation of its destruction has not yet taken place and all creation must still await and expect it."<sup>150</sup> As such, although creation has not yet been brought into its fulfilment and has, therefore, not yet been freed fully from the chains of *das Nichtige*, this does not mean that it was not created for perfection and, indeed, was not originally created perfect. The world was created perfect but because it proceeded to become subject to the uncreated and alien powers of *das Nichtige*, it does not yet fully realise this perfection or function in the manner for which it was created.

The important implication here is that God did not make a mistake when he originally brought creation into existence such that he is now faced with making changes to account for an original blunder.<sup>151</sup> It means that the present creation exists as it does because God has not yet brought it into fulfilment; it presently between that for which it has been created for and that for which it has not been created. Creation

---

<sup>149</sup> How can *das Nichtige* be destroyed? If *das Nichtige* has no negative reality with respect to the positive creation it has no reality at all. As such, for Barth, when God says 'Yes' to creation and raises it into perfection, the effects that *das Nichtige* had on creation will be confronted with a 'No' and will ultimately come to an end. There will, therefore, no longer be any menaces, alien powers or negative realities and hence there will no longer be any *reality* of *das Nichtige*.

<sup>150</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p367.

<sup>151</sup> Barth writes, "[The creature] has not come into being by chance but by necessity, and therefore not as an accident but as a sign and witness of this necessity." (Barth, *CD III.1*, 1958, p229.)

is, as it were, being held back by the *das Nichtige*, out of which it was created, in apprehension of its final consummation: the fulfilment of ‘that which it has been created for’. It is only upon Christ’s coming to free creation from the powers of *das Nichtige* that creation will fully realise its essential freedom and ultimately enter into its essential destiny as the new creation. As Barth writes, “In the final act of salvation history, i.e., in the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Foundation and Deliverer and Head of the whole of creation, the history of creation will also reach its goal and end. It will not need to progress any further, it will have fulfilled its purpose.”<sup>152</sup> The present existence of creation is, therefore, an existence that dwells in the shadow of the new creation; it is, as it were, ‘that which is not’ the new creation.

So what does it mean for creation to be ‘that which is not the new creation’? It means that it has not yet been brought into full participation with God and is consequently subject to the alien powers of ‘that which is not God’. Creation has been created for a covenantal relationship with God but by not yet fully participating in this form of existence it has, *to a certain extent*, been left to its own ‘created’ devices, to exist in a ‘relationship’ with itself, its own egocentricities, and develop as such.<sup>153</sup> Although this understanding of Barth’s might show similarities to Plantinga’s free-will defense, in that it presents God as permitting his creation to have the opportunity to develop by its own dysfunctional form of freedom, it also has key differences. The main difference being that Barth holds, as Wolterstorff writes, “[t]he sinful exercise of the free will is to be understood as not only an action of the agent, but as also, submission to the power of *das Nichtige*.”<sup>154</sup> The alien powers of *das Nichtige* are not just, therefore, a factor that disorients creation and guides it into a dysfunctional form of existence. It is, moreover, the overwhelming void in which creation is deprived of the freedom to participate fully in communion with God and, therefore, the void where creation exists in its fallen and chaotic state.

The world has been created to exist under God and, therefore, by not existing in full communion with God it does not exist as it should. By not existing fully with God there is an opening for the consequent negative power of *das Nichtige* to stop creation from existing properly, to become dysfunctional and consumed by sin and evil. Creation’s imprisonment in this situation does not suggest, however, that God

---

<sup>152</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p87.

<sup>153</sup> Barth, *CD III:1*, 1958, p94ff.

<sup>154</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p599.



does not continually uphold creation. The very continuing existence of creation is testament to God's constant preservation of it. What it does suggest, however, is that God only partially upholds creation. As such, this gives *das Nichtige* the opportunity to gain some dominion over it and cause it to exist in a confused, chaotic, imprisoned and fallen state. Creation's existence in this fallen state is not, therefore the result of some independent lord guiding it into its dysfunction, but the result of the partiality and lack of God's mighty arm to guide it into its created perfection; creation has not, as it were, been forcefully torn away from God by *das Nichtige* but has fallen away from God.<sup>155</sup> This is how a world consumed by the powers of *das Nichtige* needs to be understood - as an existence that *does not yet* participate in full communion with God and so *does not yet* have the eyes to see nor the ears to hear. Creation does not so much *gain* blindness by being prey to *das Nichtige*, but, moreover, exists in a state of blindness because it presently *lacks* the transforming power of God to bring it out of its state of blindness and into its essential existence in communion with God.

The present creation, as it is consumed by *das Nichtige*, exists in the shadow of the new creation i.e. the creation that it has ultimately been created to become. Surrounded by God's full embrace through participation within the triune *koinonia*, the new creation is creation's essential destiny and is at the very essence of what it means to be one of God's creatures. As such, what is truly alien to creation is a life outside God's kingdom of *koinonia* – a life that is 'yet to' discover its new form of existence. This life in 'alienation' accurately describes the condition of the present world in which creatures exist in communion with themselves, outside the full embrace of God and in bondage to the reign of *das Nichtige*. It is in this manner that *das Nichtige* has been permitted to have a negative effect over creation - by being the 'something' that is at the very essence of a life *without* God.<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> This could be reworded to say that creation has become imprisoned and blinded by the power of *das Nichtige*, which might seem similar to being stolen away. However, this bondage and blindness only occurs because creation is not participating in full communion with God.

<sup>156</sup> Again, Barth is speaking analogically here. He could have used 'x' instead of '*das Nichtige*' to describe what defines a life outside God's embrace because creature's are naïve to what truly lies at the essence of sin and evil – they are completely incapable of explaining and rationalising sin and evil. Why it is so significant to use the term *das Nichtige*, however, is that it correctly portrays the key theological assertions that, first, Manichean dualism is heretical and, second, there is 'nothing' that creation can use as a scapegoat for its sinfulness (it is creation itself that is wholly blameworthy for its wrongdoing).

## 2.2 The 'Lacking' or 'Privatio' of this Present World

The 'lacking' or '*privatio*' that defines this present world is what characterises it as a world consumed by the powers of *das Nichtige*. This suggests an understanding of creation as 'that which is not yet in full communion with God' and 'that which has not yet had its eyes and ears opened'. This blind and deaf existence is still, nonetheless, a very real form of existence, albeit a negative form of existence given that it is lived out in the shadow of the new creation - the creation that it is yet to become. This present creation that *lacks* the full transforming and reconciling power of God is, for Barth, the creation consumed by the power of *das Nichtige*. By understanding sin and evil in terms of the privation of God's goodness, Barth is able to play off God's insurmountable goodness and put into perspective the utter seriousness of sin and evil. Such an understanding of evil in terms of a 'lacking' or '*privatio*' is closely connected with Augustine's understanding of evil as *privatio boni*, the privation of good. Barth writes on Augustine,

Augustine used the terms [*Malum est privatio boni*] quite correctly to define the purely negative character of evil, i.e., the nullity of sin, evil and death, its nature as opposition both intrinsically and in relation to God and his creature. For Augustine privation is *corruptio* or *convérsio boni*. It is not only the absence of what really is but the assault upon it. Evil is related to good in such a way that it corrupts it and harms it. It seeks to destroy and consume it, *tendit ad non esse*, as the fire threatens to consume fuel, and is in process of doing so.<sup>157</sup>

With the apparent similarities between Barth's and Augustine's work it is perhaps surprising that Barth did not enter into much further discussion with Augustine on this matter. The reason for this could perhaps be because, whereas Augustine tended to consider evil more in terms of the privation or corruption of good, Barth tended to draw on it more as the consequence of creation only being subject to God's partial<sup>158</sup> preservation i.e. the privation of God's full embrace. Barth holds that creation has always existed in a state that has fallen away from God and

---

<sup>157</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p318.

<sup>158</sup> In this context, 'God's partial preservation' is intended to mean 'God's 'less than full' preservation.

holds that it exists in this state because it has ‘not yet’ been brought into fulfilment. It therefore lives in anticipation of its final consummation and fulfilment: when it will be resurrected by the Spirit, in the person of Christ into its essential destiny in communion with God.

These different tendencies between Barth and Augustine do not, however, suggest that their two approaches are in disagreement. Barth would agree with Augustine that the existence of sin and evil is the result of the *privation of God’s good* preservation and his *good* creativity; and Augustine, who holds that all good things come from God, would agree with Barth that the existence of evil could only be the result of God’s unfulfilled and partial work. Where the two could perhaps be seen to differ, however, is with respect to where they place their emphasis. Augustine, on the one hand, would seem to place his emphasis on how evil implies a *privatio/corruptio boni*. Barth, on the other hand, would seem to be more concerned with how evil implies a digression from God’s creative purposes and a privation of his full preservation and consummated creativity. For example, whereas Augustine considers cowardice as the corruption of a brave mind and injustice as the corruption of a just mind,<sup>159</sup> Barth would perhaps be more inclined to interpret these two weaknesses in terms of the consequence of creatures not yet existing as they were created to - fully by the grace of God.<sup>160</sup>

Although Augustine and Barth might not take identical approaches to their understanding of evil, they continue to adopt a similar stance on a number of matters concerning this issue – the reason for this being the influence that Augustine had on Barth. One of these matters is their mutual understanding that *das Nichtige* or *nihil* does not retain existence in the same way that God and creation do. For Augustine, “To have true existence is an exclusive prerogative of God”<sup>161</sup> and, for Barth, evil can only exist as the negation of this true existence. Barth and Augustine also both hold, however, that *das Nichtige/nihil* and evil do have their own kind of existence as the negation of this ‘true existence’.<sup>162</sup>

*Das Nichtige* and evil exist, for Barth, because God has not yet brought about the consummation of his creative purposes and so, to a certain extent, has left his

---

<sup>159</sup> Augustine, *Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus*, chap. 35, (accessed 2008).

<sup>160</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p85.

<sup>161</sup> Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good*, chpt 19, (accessed 2008).

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap. 13-14, (accessed 2008).

creation to its own ‘created’ devices to attempt to live by its own self-preservation.<sup>163</sup> Creation, in other words, is consumed by *das Nichtige* not because *das Nichtige* came and transformed it, but because God has yet to come and fully transform it i.e. to resurrect it. Sin and evil are not something that is gained by creation, but something that exists within creation because creation presently lacks the full reconciliatory and transformative power to deliver it from sin and evil. With respect to preservation, sin and evil exist because the mighty arm of God does not yet fully preserve creation and, as a result, the power of *das Nichtige* is able to subsume that which is not fully upheld by God. This negative power is not, however, an active power with its own independent freedom and existence; if there were no creation then there would be no reality of *das Nichtige*. Nevertheless, because creation does exist *das Nichtige* can also exist and have the opportunity to gain dominion over those aspects of creation which are not fully preserved by God. Under this dominion creation is ‘that which is not yet’ in full participation with God and ‘that which is not yet’ fully preserved by God. It is this temporal dominion that leads to the sin and evil which constitute this world in its fallenness.

### 2.3 Barth’s Account of the Rejected Possibles that Comprise Das Nichtige

At this point it would be significant to go back and consider Wolterstorff’s suggestion that Barth has no option “but to say that *in* creating, God brought about the rejected possibles”<sup>164</sup>. Wolterstorff understands Barth to hold, “that originally there was God and non-being – that is, God and nothing else; now, after creation, there is God, creatures and *all that God did not create*...God’s activity of creating perforce brings about this new realm of *that which is not*.”<sup>165</sup> He considers this position with bemusement, asking how it is that Barth can suggest “that creation consists of bringing about existent things, on the one hand, and non-existent possibles on the other”<sup>166</sup> He is stumped further by Barth’s decision to brand all rejected or

---

<sup>163</sup> The understanding that creation’s ‘own devices’ are devices that are, nonetheless, created by God is fundamental when coming to an appreciation of God’s ongoing preservation. Cf. Barth, *CD III.1*, 1958, p94. – “The creature is not self-existent... It did not come into being by itself. It does not consist by itself. It cannot sustain itself. It has to thank its creation and therefore its Creator for the fact that it came into being and is and will be.”

<sup>164</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p589.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

unactualised possibles as sinful, evil and objects of God's wrath. He asks, "Why should all those impotent, non-menacing, merely-possible wrens, robins, and sparrows be the objects of God's wrath?"<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, he asks, how do these "numberless swarm of possible wrens, robins, sparrows, and such like, to which God in his wrath said "No, I refuse to create you"... now menace creatures by trying to drag them down into the abyss where they too will become mere possibles"<sup>168</sup>? This confused response of Wolterstorff's is made in reference to Barth's following statement:

When in creation God pronounced His wise and omnipotent No... He marked off the positive reality of the creature from that which he did not elect and will and therefore did not create. And to that which He denied He allotted the being of non-being, the existence of that which does not exist... [T]hat which He did not elect and will, the non-existent, comprises the infinite range of all the possibilities which he passed over and with good reason did not actualise, the abyss in which the one thing which he did create must inevitably sink... if he who created it did not also preserve and sustain it.<sup>169</sup>

When considering this statement of Barth's in isolation, Wolterstorff appears fully justified in his criticisms and seems to provide a reasonable interpretation of Barth. It is unlikely, however, that when Barth made this statement he was committing himself to the kind of philosophical and conceptual claims which Wolterstorff is critiquing. For this reason, it would seem that Barth's problem, in the face of Wolterstorff's criticism, is not so much one of illogicality or incoherence as of over-generality. If, however, it is the case that Wolterstorff has misinterpreted Barth, the question still needs to be answered as to what Barth actually means when he makes this statement and other similar ones.

Where Wolterstorff would seem to have misinterpreted Barth, I shall suggest, is in his Platonic interpretation of what is negative or malevolent about the rejected or

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.p590.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.p589.

<sup>169</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p77.

unactualised possibles - “all that God did not create”<sup>170</sup>. Wolterstorff would seem to have interpreted Barth as attributing the negative or malevolent aspect of unactualised possibles to the possible states of affairs or states of existence that do not become actualised i.e. Tom’s not going to the shops on Thursday, square apples or the Loch Ness Monster. However, it does not seem to be the case that it is these possibles that Barth wants to consider as sinful, evil or negative but the non-existence of these possibles. If it were the case that these possibles had been actualised, Barth would have wanted to consider them in positive terms. As such, it is only the non-existence of unactualised possibles that gives them a negative status. Furthermore, it is only as *non-existent* possibles, qualified by their nothing-ness and non-being-ness, that they can be considered to ‘constitute’ *das Nichtige*.

Although unactualised possibles are neither created nor actualised by God, Barth does not imply that these possibles, in and of themselves (whether or not they are actualised), should be associated with the evil of *das Nichtige*. While Barth would want to hold, in the Augustinian tradition, that these possibles, or “exemplifiable individual ideas”<sup>171</sup>, exist as ideas (i.e. are known) in the omniscient mind of God, he would not want to hold that their rejection (in not being actualised) implies their malevolence. When Barth writes, “that which is not is that which is actual only in the negativity allotted to it by the divine decision, only in its exclusion from creation, only, if we may put it thus, at the left hand of God”<sup>172</sup>, he is not, in this context, referring specifically to ‘that which is not’ as the unexemplified ‘exemplifiable individual ideas’. What he is referring to is the potential non-existence of the *actualised* creation<sup>173</sup>, which God rejected and negated when he created. So, for example, when God creates round apples he is ‘excluding’ and ‘allotting with negativity’ the possibility of those apples not being created. As such, God’s creation

---

<sup>170</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p589.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. p590.

<sup>172</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p73-74.

<sup>173</sup> This, of course, could be conceived of as all the unactualised possibilities for creation that exist in the mind of God prior to his actualising creation. It is not, however, these possibilities that Barth wants to consider in negative or malevolent terms. Moreover, it is the ‘non-being-ness’ of these possibilities that Barth wants to consider in such terms i.e. Barth would suggest that, positively, the Loch Ness Monster exists and, negatively, the Loch Ness Monster does not exist. This will be discussed in more detail later.

of round apples should be understood as a good thing, over and against, the possibility of their not being created or being uncreated.<sup>174</sup>

As God rejects non-creation when he creates, so he also rejects sin and evil when he ultimately redeems and reconciles the present creation to himself. As such, when God ultimately raises the present creation into full communion with him, he is rejecting the potential non-existence of the new creation.<sup>175</sup> The ‘that-which-is-not’, such as the non-creation of creation and the non-establishment of the new creation only exist, for Barth, in the shadow of God’s creation and new creation. The only circumstances under which Barth would consider unexemplified ‘exemplifiable individual ideas’ as evil is if they were somehow, in and of themselves, working against God and his creative purposes. Although the devil is said to take many forms it would be puzzling if he chose to identify himself with Tom’s decision not to go to the shops on Thursday, square apples and/or the Loch Ness Monster.

So what would need to happen for unactualised possibles to work against God’s creative purposes and become evil? First, as Wolterstorff notes, in creating, God would have needed to actualise<sup>176</sup> rejected possibles, or permit them to come into existence; second, rejected possibles would need to be working against the fulfilment of God’s creative purposes; and third, God’s good creative purposes would need to be understood as the moral standard by which right and wrong, good and evil are defined. For example, consider that God had created apples to be round but somehow and for some reason (perhaps some form of natural freedom<sup>177</sup>) against his good will<sup>178</sup>, apples developed a square shape. In this scenario, the apples would not exist as they were created to and the squareness of these apples would imply a wrongful

---

<sup>174</sup> The possibility of something being uncreated would imply a division of God’s will, a change in God’s mind or the existence of another god in battle with God. As such, this possibility, although possible for God in his freedom, would be highly problematic to comprehend.

<sup>175</sup> This is the present state of creation as it consumed by ‘that which is not’.

<sup>176</sup> For this to have any cogency one would need to dichotomise the will of God into a good will and an evil will, into good creative purpose and evil creative purposes that both exist in an eternal conflict with one another. This would also mean, unless one wanted to separate God’s being from his will, a dichotomisation of God and therefore imply some new form of Sabellianism. (One might suggest that one could adhere to some form of monism, and hold that rejected possibles were initiated by the *one* will of God. However, to adhere to a monist position would be to deny the possibility of a possible being understood as rejected. In a monist understanding everything is a part of God’s good creative purposes and therefore everything is intended and nothing is rejected.)

<sup>177</sup> For example, evolution could be considered as permitted to creation such that it could develop *somewhat* freely (God will have needed to determine some things). Of course, if apples evolve into square apples, their evolving into square apples would need to be considered as a part of God’s creative purposes (even if God did not ultimately will for apples to be square).

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Wolterstorff, 1996, p590.

existence. Furthermore, if God's good purposes were considered as the moral standard, the apple's wrongful existence would need to be understood as evil. Apples are, however, not square and as far as it is possible to know are fulfilling their created purpose as round apples. With this assumed knowledge, the possible shape, size, colour etc. need not be of any moral concern for this present world. It is similarly the case with Tom's decision of whether or not to go to the shops on Thursday. If God created Tom to go to the shops every Thursday and then for some reason, perhaps misguided individual free will, Tom decided to deny his essential destiny and not to go to the shops on Thursday, this inaction would be in contradiction of his created purpose and imply a wrongdoing on Tom's part. His inaction would therefore be evil. Creatures have not, however, been created for such a purpose and this means that neither the unactualised nor the actualised possibility of Tom's choosing to go to the shops on a particular day needs to be considered as sinful or evil.

With respect to the grand scheme of God's creative purposes, Barth would want to argue that the possibilities of Tom's not going to the shops on Thursdays, the existence of square apples or the Loch Ness Monster are irrelevant because these possibilities seem neither to be a part of nor working against God's creative purposes. Furthermore, to question why God did not bring about such unactualised possibilities would be to question his creative purposes and attempt to play god. As creatures that have been created by God, Barth would want to say that creatures should faithfully accept their situation and trust that God has the best of all possible plans for it. When Christ came to redeem the world from its fallen situation he revealed that God has, from all eternity, ultimately planned to raise the world into its new home with him in paradise. The revelation of this insurmountably good plan renders all concerns for unactualised possibilities insignificant. Creatures should not, therefore, concern themselves with questions of whether unactualised possibilities are good or evil. The only factors that should be branded as sinful or evil are those factors that have been revealed as opposing God's eternal plan for creation. Such factors are revealed as malevolent when creation lies witness to God's active working to deliver it from them e.g. God's active working in his act of creation (to deliver creation from non-creation) and his active working in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (to deliver the present creation from its bondage to sin and evil). If this is the case, then, that Barth is not concerned with questions concerning possibilities that have not been actualised, why does he identify sin and evil with 'that which is not'?



Although unactualised possibles are ‘that which God does not create’, this does not necessarily mean that these possibles are, in and of themselves, the ‘that which is not’ which Barth identifies with sin and evil. Barth does not suggest, as Wolterstorff would seem to imply, that the ‘wren-ness’, ‘robin-ness’ and ‘sparrow-ness’ of the unactualised wrens, robins, and sparrows are the object of God’s wrath and the root of all evil. What Barth is suggesting is that it is the *unactuality* of such unactualised possibles, that is, their being “allotted the being of non-being”,<sup>179</sup> that needs to be understood in negative terms. His reason for arguing this point is that unactuality is the negation of the positively understood ‘actuality’. Those possibles, therefore, which have been allotted the ‘being of being’ have been given a positive existence, whereas those possibles that are allotted the ‘being of non-being’ have not been given existence and, therefore, cannot be understood positively (in the sense that positively, a wren would have actual being and, negatively, a wren would not have actual being).

Barth’s understanding on this matter is rooted in the tradition, which Wolterstorff would also want to affirm, that being created and brought into existence is a good thing and, therefore, not being created or being uncreated is a bad thing. As we have seen, however, it is not the unactualised ‘wren-ness’, ‘robin-ness’, ‘sparrow-ness’ or the ‘Tom’s-not-going-to-the-shops-on-Thursday-ness’, ‘square-apple-ness’ or ‘Loch-Ness-Monster-ness’ that constitute the negativity and malevolence of *das Nichtige* for Barth’s approach. Contrary to Wolterstorff’s interpretation, it is only on the basis that unactualised possibles *are nothing* that Barth understands them in negative terms. Barth does not merely associate unactualised possibles with *das Nichtige* but identifies them *as das Nichtige* and it is this non-Godliness that is at the root of all evil.

If it is the case that it is only the non-being-ness of unactualised possibles that constitutes their negativity, then why does Barth write, “that which He did not elect and will, the non-existent, comprises the infinite range of all the possibilities which he passed over and with good reason did not actualise”<sup>180</sup>? Consider the parents who after having four children decide against having a fifth. This decision against the potential little, blue-eyed, blonde-haired Jenny does not necessarily imply that the parents consider this potential little Jenny as wrongful; there are other reasons, such

<sup>179</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p77.

<sup>180</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p77 (emphasis mine).

as limited resources, for why the parents might have decided against trying for a fifth child. It is along these lines that Barth would not consider the failure of non-existent possibles to achieve existence as necessarily implying their wrongfulness; such a non-event is not the negation of God's creative purposes but an absence of God's creative purposes. The negation of God's creative purposes, which Barth would want to identify with wrongfulness, would, to reiterate, be the event of existent possibles slipping back into the non-existence from whence they came. This movement would be wrongful because it would be both a reversal and confrontation of God's good creative purposes.<sup>181</sup> So, for example, it would be wrong for the four actualised children to slip back into non-existence but it would not, therefore, be wrong for Jenny not to come into existence, nor would it be wrong for all the other innumerable potential Jennys not to come into existence.

If a person uses their imagination to assign names and descriptions to unactualised possibles and then goes on to discuss such possibles in real terms this should not be considered as giving them some form of reality. Just because Jenny can be considered in real terms as a little, blue-eyed, blonde-haired girl, does not mean that she is somehow actual; Jenny is not actual, she is non-existent and is, therefore, like all other unactualised possibles, nothing. This is also, therefore, the case for Wolterstorff's non-existent possible wrens, robins or swallows that, along with Jenny, need to be considered as constituents of *das Nichtige*.<sup>182</sup> As such, discussion of possible wrens etc. is and should therefore be no different from discussion of *das Nichtige*, which Barth considers as the ultimate opponent to God's creative purposes. What might make them seem different, and why Wolterstorff might seem to conceive of them differently, is if unactualised possibles are considered platonically in real terms. By making this move and showing a concern for the 'impotent, non-menacing' unactualised possibles, Wolterstorff would seem to be attributing reality (in the sense of a form of existence) to the unactualised possibles of *das Nichtige* as opposed to the

---

<sup>181</sup> Unless, of course, God's creative purposes had two wills: one for creation and one for uncreation. This image of a surrendering and/or inconsistent god, however, does not describe the ever-persevering God who is revealed in Scripture as the Good Shepherd and patient Father. This is not to suggest that he is not free to have two conflicting wills, but to suggest that he has not been revealed as having a dichotomised wills.

<sup>182</sup> The term 'constituents' is being used analogically. 'Nothing' should not be understood as a conglomerate of unactualised possibles; each and every unactualised possible is 'nothing' and, therefore, a conglomerate of unactualised possibles is not a mixture of different non-existent 'elements' but, moreover, *is* nothing. There is no 'different non-existent elements' and for this reason the non-existent wren is no different from the non-existent sparrow; they are both 'nothing'.

non-existent reality that Barth would want to affirm. Such a manipulation of Barth's thought would place him in the Manichean dualist camp that he is so adamantly against.

To return to the analogy that was used above of the parents not having a fifth child because of limited time or resources, it should be noted that this analogy is clearly flawed because God does not suffer from limitations of time and resources. This being said, however, there are certain things which God cannot do. It is not possible for God to actualise every one of the infinite range of possibilities for the simple reason that there will always be one more wren, situation or fantastical entity for God to create.<sup>183</sup> It is also not possible for God to actualise every alternative possibility because some alternatives are inherently contradictory, for example, Tom cannot simultaneously go and not go to the shop. Given such a limitation, God will have needed to make some choices based on his purposeful preference. Such a preference does not necessarily imply that unactualised possibles, such as square apples, would have been malevolent but, at worst, implies that they might have had lesser purposefulness. It could also be argued, if one wanted to hold to a less deterministic account, that God determined that creation should have some 'freedom' to develop in its own manner. The consequence of this 'freedom' could be that apples became round (as the result of the evolutionary process)<sup>184</sup> and/or, to consider another example, that Tom decides not to go to the shops on Thursday (as the result of free-will).

Another limitation that should be considered here is the temporality of this present state of affairs. God did not intend for this present world to be an unending state of affairs and, therefore, there is only so much that can come into existence in the short-term period between the beginning and end of creation. This time limit, which God placed on this world, should not be understood as being implemented to stop certain possibles from becoming actualised, but should be understood to exist because God does not will for this present state of affairs to be an unending or ultimate state of affairs. What about the possibles, therefore, that do not receive the

---

<sup>183</sup> This renders it ridiculous to ask what more God could have created, because it is a question that can always be asked no matter how much God decides to create.

<sup>184</sup> Of course, if the roundness of apples were the product of evolution, then the theist would need to hold that this roundness was the result of God's determining apples to be directed towards this end through the evolutionary process. It is for this reason that this account was considered as 'less-deterministic' as opposed to 'undeterministic', which would imply perennial naturalism and random natural selection.

opportunity to come into existence? These were never an intended part of God's creative purposes and therefore these apparent 'would have been possibles' never actually 'would have been'; they are quite simply 'nothing' and so should not be given a second thought. Whether an unactualised possible did not come into existence because of God's incapacity to create all possibles, whether it was the result of the temporal limitations God placed on this world or whether it was the result of some other reason, the fact that such a possible did not come into existence should mean that it is of no concern to Christian thought.<sup>185</sup> What God chose to create he created with the greatest of all purposes. So for a person to seek to point to the shortcomings of such a purpose would be to attempt to assume divine authority.

#### 2.4 *The Unactualised Possibles of Sin and Evil*

Although Barth might not be concerned about the unactualised wrens, robins etc., which have no influence over creation, he does concern himself with the unactualised possibilities of sin and evil that do indeed influence creation and, furthermore, are at work against God's creative purposes. By not being directly actualised by God, these products of *das Nichtige* are just as unactualised as the unactualised wrens, robins etc. However, unlike the unactualised wrens and robins, Barth holds that sin and evil are able to achieve a permitted actuality as a very real opponent to God's creative purposes. If it is correct to interpret Barth as holding that God did not directly actualise sin and evil then Wolterstorff would seem to be mistaken when he suggests that, for Barth, God did in fact bring about sin and evil. However, if it is going to be suggested that Wolterstorff is wrong in this assertion, then another response is needed to address Wolterstorff's previous concern as to how Barth could consider the rejected possibles of sin and evil as possessing actuality without holding them to have been directly actualised by God.

For Barth, God did not directly bring about the rejected possibles of sin and evil, *das Nichtige* did. This bare response to the problem is, of course, insufficient because it still leaves open the question of how *das Nichtige*, if it truly is nothingness, can have any power, let alone the power to bring something about. The key to answering this question comes when creation is brought into the equation and

---

<sup>185</sup> Unless, of course, unactualised possibles are being discussed with the purpose of undermining any real significance they might be considered to have.

considered as a reality that has been created by God, on the one hand, but has also been permitted to lie prey to *das Nichtige*, on the other. Creation is key since *das Nichtige* is only capable of actualisation and thus of bringing about sin and evil if God creates something that lacks his full embrace. Creation is this ‘something’ and, hence, it is only *in and through creation* that there can be this ‘lack’, which Barth would want to associate with the power of *das Nichtige* taking hold. This has two implications: first, it suggests that, although God may not directly actualise rejected possibles, by actualising the creation that provides (and he knew would provide) the way for sin and evil to achieve actuality he is indirectly actualising them; and second, it suggests that it is not God’s but *das Nichtige*’s grasp over creation that directly leads to the existence of sin and evil. God could be seen as planting the seed of creation. However, by not yet nourishing it with his full preservation the world is not able to flourish as it was created to but becomes strangled by the grip of *das Nichtige*.

In sum, these two implications suggest that in and through the act of creation God brought about a situation whereby *das Nichtige* could achieve actuality and bring about sin and evil. This interpretation of Barth is significantly different from Wolterstorff’s interpretation<sup>186</sup> because it does not make God out to be directly responsible or culpable for the existence of sin and evil. It still, however, does not answer the question of how sin and evil can achieve “actuality only under the almighty No of God”<sup>187</sup>? The reasoning that something can achieve existence by being rejected would seem to be, as Wolterstorff suggests, “flawed”.<sup>188</sup> It becomes even more problematic when it is considered, as Wolterstorff notes, that “presumably God’s *opus proprium*, God’s Yes-saying [(and consequent no-saying or rejecting)], continues; hence... *das Nichtige* also continues. Or does God’s *opus proprium* not continue? Does God’s work cease? Does God rest?”<sup>189</sup>. To respond to these problems it would be helpful to reconsider what Barth means when he refers to *das Nichtige* as ‘actual’ or ‘real’. It would also be significant to consider how, for Barth, achieving actuality under the almighty ‘No’ of God means the same as being brought about by *das Nichtige*.

---

<sup>186</sup> To reiterate, Wolterstorff held that Barth had no option “but to say that *in* creating, God brought about the rejected possibles.” Wolterstorff, 1996, p589.

<sup>187</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p74.

<sup>188</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p598.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* p602.

As was discussed previously, for Barth, 'real' means "in opposition to the totality of God's creation"<sup>190</sup>. Understood in these terms, the reality of *das Nichtige* is considered by Barth to be "a power which, though unsolicited and uninvited, is superior, like evil and death, to all the forces which the creature can oppose to it. As negation nothingness has its own dynamic, the dynamic of damage and destruction with which the creature cannot cope."<sup>191</sup> This reality of *das Nichtige* is confirmed, for Barth, by the "the sin of man"<sup>192</sup>. In this confirmation *das Nichtige* is described as "a factor so real that the creature of God, and among his creatures man especially in whom the purpose of creation is revealed, is not only confronted by it and becomes its victim, but makes himself its agent."<sup>193</sup> Although Wolterstorff does not question the reality of sin, he questions the possibility of its reality being brought about by *das Nichtige* and achieving actuality under the mighty 'No' of God. Barth, however, wants to affirm this reasoning because,

1. Sin can only exist as 'sin' under the almighty No of God. If God did not reject the reality of sin, then it would not be sin. Rather it would have to be regarded as a significant part (purposeful good) of his creative purposes.
2. If sin and evil are not affirmed as being brought about by *das Nichtige*, and Barth is not to advocate a monist position and consider them as part of God's creative purposes, he would need to affirm some form of Manichaeism and consider them as a part of some other existent thing's purposes.

It is unlikely that Wolterstorff would not have considered these reasons and a mere presentation of them still leaves open the problem of how sin and evil can achieve actuality under the almighty 'No' of God. To answer this question a further question needs to be asked concerning how *das Nichtige* finds its actuality and power *in and through creation*.

By creating a world that would be allowed to exist temporarily outside his full embrace, God made it possible for *das Nichtige* to consume those parts of creation

---

<sup>190</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p310.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. p310.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. p352.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

that are not yet fully subject to God but are partly subject to *nothing*. Although it is God that subjects the world to this present state of affairs, this does not mean that it is a state of affairs that God ultimately intends for his creation.<sup>194</sup> Barth, moreover, considers them as a state of existence that is firmly at odds with God's ultimate creative purposes. It is within creation's nothing-oriented<sup>195</sup> state that sin and evil are able to find their ground in creation and confirm the reality of *das Nichtige* as the factor that leads creation into a life that it has not been created for. Under these circumstances, the portrayal of creation's existence as subject to *das Nichtige* is merely a different way of describing the state of creation as it is deprived of God's full embrace - as it is subject to 'that which is not' God's full embrace. In this present state of affairs, therefore, on the one hand, God retains sovereignty over sin and evil because he is able to determine the level of their existence by determining the fullness of his embrace over creation.<sup>196</sup> On the other hand, however, he is not culpable for its existence because he does not *actively* determine its existence but,<sup>197</sup> moreover, actively confronts it, rejects it and overcomes it.

If it is the case, however, that God rejects the present state of affairs as it is consumed by *das Nichtige*, then the question arises as to how *das Nichtige* can achieve existence on the very basis of being rejected by God? It exists because, although God has eternally rejected the dominion of *das Nichtige*, he still permits it to have a temporal reign before ultimately actualising his full rejection of it and vanquishing it forevermore. To have existence on the basis of being rejected by God is, for Barth, to exist in the shadow of a new and transformed existence that has yet to be actualised; to exist as 'that which is not yet' the new creation. This is the present state of creation, as it exists in the shadow of the new creation. God's ultimate rejection of this present state of affairs and the anticipated breaking in of the new creation is revealed to the world, for Barth, through the person of Jesus Christ. When

---

<sup>194</sup> For Barth, "The creature's right and meaning and goal and purpose and dignity lie – only – in the fact that God as the Creator has turned *toward* it with His purpose." (Barth, *CD III.1*, 1958, p94, (emphasis mine).)

<sup>195</sup> A nothing-oriented state inevitably implies a nothing-external-to-the-self-oriented state and this clearly suggests a self-oriented state. This state of existence is lived out over and against a God-oriented state. It is a state of existence animated by the flesh (*soma psychikon*) as opposed to a state animated by the Holy Spirit (*soma pneumatikon*) (1 Cor. 15. 40-44).

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.1*, 1958, p126-127.

<sup>197</sup> A clear objection to this is that inaction can still imply culpability. This culpability is diminished, however, if it is trusted that God has the best of all possible reasons for his inactivity and, furthermore, when it is trusted that everything will ultimately turn out for the best in the consummation of God's creative purposes. This will be discussed further later in the thesis.

Christ suffers and is put to death on the cross God reveals and realises his eternal rejection of the present sinful state of affairs. It is through this death that sin is ultimately brought to an end. Then, however, through Christ's resurrection God reveals his eternal plan to resurrect the present creation into the new creation (1 Cor. 15.20-22).

The problem that Wolterstorff raises concerning whether the reign of *das Nichtige*, will continue alongside God's Yes-saying is answered by considering God's ultimate Yes. For Barth, *das Nichtige* can only exist and only continue to exist if "God is against it [and]... against it in jealousy, wrath and judgement."<sup>198</sup> For Barth, it only exists "within [these] limits thus ordained."<sup>199</sup> What this implies is that *das Nichtige* can only continue its incursions up to the point where God exclaims his ultimate 'No' to it in judgement and becomes victorious over it. Following this victory there is no longer anything to which God is against. As such *das Nichtige* only exists as a past shadow that is no longer able to find any basis within or purchase on reality. The new creation is brought into existence in the final consummation of God's creative purposes; it is the ultimate creation and does not exist in the shadow of another and even better new creation. This 'No' to the reign of *das Nichtige* has already been exclaimed by God when he sent his Son to suffer and die on the cross. However, it is only upon the coming of God's kingdom and the embracing of creation into full communion with him that God will fully actualise his rejection of *das Nichtige's* reign and the sin and evil that results from it. In this ultimate act God and his creation will no longer be confronted by the grasp of *das Nichtige* and God will no longer subject himself to watching it in jealousy, wrath and judgement. On this new day, all the No-saying is brought to an end because in the initiation of the new creation God utters his ultimate and eternal and all-embracing Yes.

The unactualised possibles of sin and evil exist, for Barth, in opposition to God's creative purposes. They arise as a consequence of the world's not yet being fully upheld by God, but remaining under the reign of nothing (*das Nichtige*). The subjection to *das Nichtige* over and against full subjection to God is at the very essence of what undergirds sin and evil and is the main reason why they are identified with nothingness. If, however, I am going to consider *das Nichtige* as the scapegoat to

---

<sup>198</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p353.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.



explain how Barth understands rejected possibles to come about, the next question that arises is how *das Nichtige* could have come about.

### 2.5 How Does Barth Understand *Das Nichtige* to have Achieved its Dominion?

As has so far been discussed, Barth considers *das Nichtige* to have had its own form of existence in its non-existence, “the being of non-being”,<sup>200</sup> and this reality is realised in and through creation. On the one hand, *das Nichtige*’s existence as ‘the nothing else apart from God’ was rejected when God willed for another. On the other hand, however, its existence as ‘the voids that refuse, resist and therefore lack God’s grace’<sup>201</sup> were able to be realised when God created an existence that was not yet encompassed by his full embrace – that had not yet experienced the fullness of his kingdom.<sup>202</sup> Barth understands these voids in creation’s preservation as the chaos in which rejected possibles have the opportunity to exist. They are those aspects of creation which do not yet experience in fullness the mighty arm of God; they are the death and suffering, the unguided moral disasters, the untamed natural disasters, and, essentially, they are sin and evil.

Although at times Barth’s understanding of *das Nichtige*’s distinct ‘existence’ might seem to undermine God’s sovereignty, it fundamentally does not because at no point does he consider it in terms of an independent creator. For Barth, when rejected possibles are brought about by *das Nichtige* it is the consequence of a *lack* of creation and preservation and not *an act* of creation and preservation: it is the result of inactivity as opposed to a specific act. When God originally brought creation into existence he did not instantaneously transform it into its ultimate form by immediately raising it into full communion with him, but created it such that it would be permitted to exist temporarily outside his full embrace. God still preserved his good creation however such that it could exist. Nevertheless, by not yet fully preserving it he permitted the uncreated realities of sin and evil to develop. The reason that these realities came into existence along with creation, for Barth, was not because they were a part of God’s creation. For Barth, God’s creation is wholly good.

---

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. p77.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. p353.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. p367.

They came into existence alongside creation because they were dependent upon there being a creation in which they could develop.

A parallel can again be drawn here between Barth and Augustine who holds, “evil cannot exist without good or in anything that is not good.”<sup>203</sup> By not yet fully preserving creation but instead leaving voids in his preserving activity, the reality of *das Nichtige* was able to constitute an environment in which sin and evil could develop. Thus, by not yet choosing to bring creation to fulfilment, God permitted it to become chaotic with sin and evil. Without the all-preserving power of God to medicate it, creation fell sick; without the fully guiding hands of God to guide it, creation became lost and imprisoned in a state of disorientation<sup>204</sup>; and without God’s Spirit to revitalise it, creation became weak and helpless.<sup>205</sup> These analogies<sup>206</sup>, although problematic, seek to communicate the significant point that sin and evil result from a lacking and *privatio* of God’s all-preserving power, his guiding hands, and his revitalising Spirit. Put concisely, for Barth, sin and evil exist because “God still permits His kingdom not to be seen by us”.<sup>207</sup>

Without yet experiencing the ultimate creative act for which creation has been elected - the act which will raise it up into its essential destiny - creation does not exist as it should. Consequently, it is consumed by *das Nichtige*. Wolterstorff’s bewilderment at how rejected possibles could be ‘brought about’ is grounded in an understanding that rejected possibles exist, for Barth, because of something gained as opposed to something lacking. This is made apparent from Wolterstorff’s question

---

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap. 14 (accessed 2008) – “But although no one can doubt that good and evil are contraries, not only can they exist at the same time, but evil cannot exist without good or in anything that is not good. Good, however, can exist without evil. For a man or an angel can exist without being wicked; but nothing can be wicked except a man or an angel: and so far as he is a man or an angel, he is good; so far as he is wicked, he is an evil. And these two contraries are so far co-existent, that if good did not exist in what is evil, neither could evil exist; because corruption could not have either a place to dwell in, or a source to spring from, if there were nothing that could be corrupted; and nothing can be corrupted except what is good, for corruption is nothing else but the destruction of good. From what is good, then, evils arose, and except in what is good they do not exist; nor was there any other source from which any evil nature could arise.”

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III:2*, 1960, p197-198 – “Sin means that he is lost in himself, but not to his Creator...”

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap. 11, *Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus*, chap. 35 and *On the Nature of the Good*, (accessed 2008).

<sup>206</sup> This use of analogy does not intend to provide any form of historical account. Historically, Barth would want to affirm that from the point when creation was first created to the point when it is ultimately transformed into the new creation, creation does not find its fulfilment. It is only upon being realised as the new creation, that creation is freed from the powers of *das Nichtige* and finds its fulfilment in full communion with God.

<sup>207</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p367.

about ‘how God’s rejection of these possibles could bring them about’<sup>208</sup> and his question, “Don’t [the possibles] have to be there already if God is to reject them?”<sup>209</sup> Both these questions imply that rejected possibles, or the sin and evil that constitute *das Nichtige*, need to have some kind of independent existence if God is to reject them. This, however, is precisely what Barth is refusing to suggest. For Barth, sin and evil need to be interpreted as ‘that which is not God’ and ‘that which is not creation’. When Wolterstorff considers the dualist aspect in Barth between “a bright side and a shadow side”<sup>210</sup>, there are points in his article in which he would seem to interpret this dual aspect as a *dualism*.<sup>211</sup> There is, however, fundamentally no dualism in Barth’s account except between ‘that which is God’ and ‘that which is not God’; between ‘that which is created by God’ and ‘that which is not created by God’; and between ‘that for which creation has been created’ and ‘that for which creation has not been created’. This being said, however, Barth also writes,

“[N]othingness is not simply to be equated with what is *not*, i.e., not God and not the creature. God is God and not the creature, but this does not mean there is nothingness in God... Again, the creature is creature and not God, yet this does mean that as such it is null or nothingness.”<sup>212</sup>

There is clearly not just a twofold relationship between God and *das Nichtige* but a threefold relationship between God, creation and *das Nichtige* that needs to be considered. This threefold relationship, however, does not undermine the dualist aspect in Barth’s thought between God and *das Nichtige*. The fallen creation, it could be said, is caught between God and *das Nichtige*: it is related to God in its createdness and purpose but also related to *das Nichtige* in its fallenness and other-than-Godness.<sup>213</sup> As such, the distinctions between God and the fallen world and between the fallen world and *das Nichtige* do not have the same dual aspect that emerge when God is distinguished from *das Nichtige*. How the threefold polarities between God, creation and *das Nichtige* fit into the duality of God and *das Nichtige* will be

---

<sup>208</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p589.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p349.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap. 12 (accessed 2008).

discussed further in the next section, but for now what is important to grasp is that, first, although there is a duality there is no ontological dualism in Barth; second, there is a clear threefold relationship between God, creation and, *das Nichtige*; and third, the only seemingly dualistic distinction is between God and *das Nichtige*.<sup>214</sup>

For Barth, although *das Nichtige* might have a form of existence in its non-existence this existence is, to reiterate, not comparable to the type of existence that God or his creation have. *Das Nichtige*'s negative existence, which is realised through the sin and evil in the fallen creation, is an existence that is dependent upon there being a creation that does not participate in full communion with God – it is dependent upon there being a next more complete stage in the fulfilment of God's creative purposes.<sup>215</sup> When God ultimately raises creation into full participation with him, he rejects those voids in creation where it has been consumed by *das Nichtige*, and fills them with his embrace. He rejects the blindness and deafness of creation by opening its eyes and ears, he rejects the prodigal and solo venture of creation by embracing it into communion with him and he rejects *das Nichtige*'s stranglehold on creation by welcoming it into his kingdom. In doing these things he brings about the fulfilment of his creative purposes. As it is written in Hebrews, "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." (Heb. 11.40 (NIV))

God's rejection of *das Nichtige*'s dominion over creation, however, has not yet been realised, as is apparent from the present existence of sin and evil. Although God rejects *das Nichtige* he still permits it to retain a temporary dominion within creation and, therefore, still allows it to bring about sin and evil. God, however, ultimately rejects this dominion and therefore, for Barth, *das Nichtige* should be understood as anything less than a menace and enemy to God and his creative purposes. For Barth, it is "that to which God said No when He said Yes to the creature."<sup>216</sup> Thus it is only from the perspective of God's ultimate creative purposes that *das Nichtige* can be understood as a menace. This is because God's purposes should be understood as the standard by which all menaces are defined as menaces and all goods are defined as good. If something works against God's creative purposes it is a menace and if something is a part of his creative purposes it is good.

---

<sup>214</sup> Although creation is affected by this dualist distinction, it is not incorporated in it.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p74.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. p76.

Thus, when God reveals his plans to bring about the ultimate consummation of his creative purposes and raise creation into communion with him he does so with the direct intention of exposing the menaces that for the present, albeit temporarily, consume his creation. More importantly, however, in Jesus Christ he reveals his victory over - and abolition of - this menace, filling creation with the good news and an eschatological hope for a new and eternal life.

From all eternity God has determined that creation would finally have its eyes and ears opened; that it would ultimately be raised into perfection. This will occur when God raises the present creation out of the shadow of the new creation (all that it was created to become), and transforms it into this new creation. When this event occurs creation will no longer be consumed by 'that which it is not' or overshadowed by 'that which it has been created to be' but will finally become 'that which it has been created to be'. When this transformation and reconciliation are realised, creation will become free from its dysfunction through participation within the triune *koinonia*: the essential destiny for which it has been eternally elected.

### 3. Why Would God Permit *Das Nichtige* to Have Any Grasp Over Creation?

#### 3.1 *Sin and Evil and the Good of the Creature*

The questions that now come to the fore concern why God would permit *das Nichtige* to have any grasp over his creation and the closely related question, what effects *das Nichtige* has on creation. When considering these questions it is important to realise that Barth did not intend to try and put himself in God's shoes and engage in some form of theodicy. This does not mean, however, that there cannot be a consideration of the extent to which Barth did address these questions.

The reason that *das Nichtige* has any grasp over creation, for Barth, is, as we have pointed out, that "God still permits His kingdom not to be seen by us, and to that extent He still permits us to be prey to nothingness".<sup>217</sup> What this suggests is that creation has not yet experienced the fulfilment of a life within God's kingdom and, therefore, has not yet undergone the transformation that will raise it into the fullness of his kingdom. In this context *das Nichtige* is that which opposes God's redemptive and reconciliatory work by grasping onto creation and preventing it from achieving this fulfilment. In seeking to deny a monist account, Barth would want to affirm that *das Nichtige* is fundamentally not a part or aspect of God's good creation but the distinct shadow that falls behind it. Sin and evil are also, therefore, realities which only exist in the shadow of the new creation. It is these that become non-existent when creation is freed from *das Nichtige*'s stranglehold; when it is liberated from bondage to this alien power and raised into the essential destiny that awaits it within God's kingdom.

This brief answer might provide some explanation as to why *das Nichtige* has any grasp over creation and why creation does not exist as it was created to, in full obedience to God. It does not, however, explain why God did not originally raise creation into its final consummated state or, indeed, why God permits creation to remain prey to *das Nichtige*. For Barth, as Wolterstorff understands him, "God for God's own reasons now permits the existential menace to continue its excursions, these good reasons consisting, at least in part, of the fact that evil itself is now forced to contribute to the good of the creature... for reasons which in their totality are

---

<sup>217</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p367.

known to God alone; God permits *das Nichtige* to continue to work evil.”<sup>218</sup> This understanding of Wolterstorff’s would seem to be accurate. However, when he writes, “evil *itself* is now forced to contribute to the good of the creature”, it is imperative that this be interpreted carefully. Although Wolterstorff might be right in suggesting this, it is extremely important that *das Nichtige* is not considered to be a tool that comes from God but, rather as an instrument that is forced to become a servant of God’s will and action.<sup>219</sup> As Barth writes, “Even though [*das Nichtige*] does not will to do so it is forced to serve [God], to serve His Word and work, the honour of His Son, the proclamation of the Gospel, the faith of the community, and therefore the way which He Himself wills to go within and with His creation until its day is done. The defeated, captured and mastered enemy of God has as such become his servant.”<sup>220</sup>

If Barth understands evil as being able to contribute to the good of the creature, the question might arise as to why it should not be considered as a tool that is directly intended by God? By holding that *das Nichtige* is forced to become God’s servant, Barth is in no way wanting to affirm the sort of monist approach that Plantinga takes advocating sin and evil as an aspect of God’s creative purposes. This does not necessarily suggest, however, that Barth does not, like Plantinga, hold to some form of *Felix Culpa* approach. In his book *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Scott Rodin argues, “Barth unhesitantly embraces the idea of *Felix Culpa*”<sup>221</sup>. He goes on,

We recognise that Barth wants to deny evil any positive role and yet he employs this ‘necessary antithesis’ throughout his handling of the problem of evil. It begins with the fundamental understanding of God’s purposes in creation not to have fellowship *per se*, but to grant to his creation a special status and participation which is only available to it through the act of reconciliation and devotion to which God is committed prior to the first moment of creation. Salvation and redemption and all they mean for the eternal fellowship of God with

---

<sup>218</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p605.

<sup>219</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p367. This instrument arises as the unwilled but inevitable result of God creating the particular creation that he does and which allows to exist temporarily apart from him.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. pp367-368.

<sup>221</sup> Rodin, 1997, p85.

His creation are the meaning and goal of creation... Salvation history is the goal of creation, and therefore the Fall is fundamentally important to the execution and completion of this goal. *O' Felix Culpa!*<sup>222</sup>

Rodin makes this statement in response to Barth's discussion of the significance of a post-Fall creature when Barth asks, "Is it not the case that now for the first time the reality of the creature emerges as a reality distinct from God and the preserving grace of God as grace that as such waits for gratitude and can only be really received in gratitude?"<sup>223</sup> In this statement a parallel can be drawn between Barth and Irenaeus who also, as John Hick notes, hints at the *Felix Culpa* theme.<sup>224</sup> The Irenaean type of theodicy holds that God created creatures to fall and experience infancy and imperfection prior to being redeemed and reconciled into perfection.<sup>225</sup> Like Irenaeus, Barth would seem to want to hold the Fall to be a part of God's creative purposes and a situation over which God retained full sovereignty.<sup>226</sup> However, whereas Irenaeus' *Felix Culpa* account of the Fall would seem to show a greater concern for creatures having the opportunity to acquire a certain moral agency (discipline through growth and nourishment<sup>227</sup>) Barth's account would seem to show a greater concern for the creature achieving an autonomy that would enable it to find further distinction from God. Before going on to discuss this aspect of Barth in more detail, the question needs to be asked as to whether Barth's holding to a *Felix Culpa* account would imply his adherence to a monist understanding of evil.

That Barth is indeed willing to identify with a *Felix Culpa* account is made clear when he writes: "And He has turned more intimately to the creature than before. Something other and greater than mere creation has now taken place. It is so much greater that the dangerous saying is forced to our lips: *felix culpa, quae talem et*

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. pp87-88.

<sup>223</sup> Barth, *CD II.1*, 1957, p508. Translated from the German - "[I]ntimer hat er sich jetzt der Kreatur zugewendet als vorher. Etwas Anderes, Größeres als die bloße Schöpfung ist jetzt Ereignis geworden: so viel größer, daß sich das gefährliche Wort von der *felix culpa, quae talem et tantum meruit habere redemptorem* (*Missale Rom.* Liturgie vom Karsamstag) schon hier auf die Lippen drängt - und gerade in diesem Anderen, Größeren doch nichts Anderes als gerade die für uns verwirkte, jetzt erst offenbar gewordene Herrlichkeit des Schöpfers und der Schöpfung."

<sup>224</sup> Hick, 1977, p218.

<sup>225</sup> Although it would be greatly significant to enter into further discussion with Irenaeus, space does not allow for this. Cf. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 4.38.2-3, 4.39.1, 3.20.2 (accessed 2008) and *ibid.* pp207-276.

<sup>226</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.1*, 1957, p233ff, *CD II.2*, 1957, pp128-129, and Cf. Rodin, 1997, p116.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 4.38.3, 4.39.1 and 3.20.2. (accessed 2008).



*tantum meruit redemptorem* (Roman Missal, Liturgy for the Saturday before Easter Day).<sup>228</sup> Rodin is thus correct in asserting that Barth adheres to a form of the *Felix Culpa*. Holding to such a stance does not, however, as I have already argued, lock Barth into a monist account. As Rodin also makes clear, “For Barth, humanity’s fall was its own doing despite its inevitability. He holds here to an Augustinian line whereby the origins of sin are in the will and not in the nature of humanity as created by God.”<sup>229</sup> For Barth, God does not ultimately intend sin and evil in order to bring about his good purpose. Rather, he *consequently* incorporates these inevitabilities (which he permitted to arise within creation) within the benefits of the atonement and its triumph over sin and evil.<sup>230</sup>

Although Barth is quite adamant that Scripture maintains creatures’ “full responsibility for [sin’s] commission”<sup>231</sup>, he also wants to affirm the Scriptural references to sin as “surrender to the alien power of an adversary.”<sup>232</sup> As Barth goes on, “[man] is led astray and harms himself, or rather lets himself be harmed. He is not merely a thief but one who has fallen among thieves.”<sup>233</sup> The ‘thieves’ that creatures fall among are *das Nichtige* and the ‘concrete form’ of the creature’s relationship with *das Nichtige* is revealed, for Barth, as,

“[man’s] personal act and guilt, his aberration from the grace of God and its command, his refusal of the gratitude he owes to God and the concomitant freedom and obligation, his arrogant attempt to be his own master, provider and comforter, his unhallowed lust for what is not his own, the falsehood, hatred and pride in which he is enmeshed in relation to his neighbour, the stupidity to which he is self-condemned, and a life which follows the course thereby determined on the basis of the necessity thus imposed.”<sup>234</sup>

---

<sup>228</sup> Barth, *CD II.1*, 1957, p507.

<sup>229</sup> Rodin, 1997, p137.

<sup>230</sup> This is how Barth would want to interpret Rom. 8.28 - “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

<sup>231</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p310 and Cf. Barth, *CD III: 2*, 1960, p197.

<sup>232</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p310.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. and cf. Wolterstorff, 1996, pp598-599.

<sup>234</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p305.

In this revelation of the creature's relationship with *das Nichtige* as also in the light of Jesus Christ, Barth writes, "it is impossible to escape the truth that we ourselves as sinners have become the victims and servants of nothingness, sharing its nature and producing and extending it."<sup>235</sup>

The creature's responsibility for its sinfulness and its surrender to *das Nichtige* are so completely intertwined that both, for Barth, seems to imply the other. As such, when persons act sinfully it is they who are responsible for their sinfulness because it is they alone (nothing else) that have determined their actions. However, when it is considered that such persons cannot help but act sinfully it also becomes apparent that they are in bondage to that way of living. This bondage is understood, by Barth, as enslavement to the alien power of *das Nichtige*. It is only through participation in Christ and through a life by the Spirit that a person can become free from bondage to *das Nichtige* and find perfection in the arms of God. When a person is delivered and liberated from *das Nichtige* he becomes a new and righteous person. This new person, however, cannot claim responsibility for his righteousness because, unlike the old person, the new person does not live by and is not subject to their inner self but is subject to a life by the Spirit in Christ. It is only in and through the work of the Trinity that a new person, participating within the triune relations, can be determined as righteous. As such, the new person can only boast in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who raises them into new life. So, whereas the sinfulness of a creature is inevitably determined by being subject to one's own individuality (or their being subject to the power of *das Nichtige* (nothing else)), the righteousness of a creature is determined by participation within the Triune *koinonia*.

Barth holds that sin and evil can neither be associated with nor be understood as a part of God's creative purposes but, rather, they should be understood as an inevitability that results from God's decision to create a world that exists temporarily apart from him. This inevitability is then consequently incorporated by God into his creative purposes and used by him to develop the right relationship with his creation through the processes of redemption and reconciliation. If evil were to be considered as a tool that came directly *from* God and which he used for his creative purposes, the whole of salvation history could not be understood as anything less than a process of manipulation. If, on the other hand, it is understood that God merely permitted sin

---

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

and evil to come into existence and then, consequently, incorporated them into his creative purposes, God's overwhelming sovereignty shines through and he is seen not to be implicated in the existence of sin and evil.

Consider the analogy of a person who saves a stranger from falling over a cliff. After this incident the two persons might become close friends and the victim would probably have an overwhelming gratitude to the one who saved his life. The relationship that might develop after this incident may be a good thing that would have been achieved as a consequence of this incident. This would not, however, imply that the incident of the person nearly falling over a cliff was a good thing nor would it imply that it would have been good for the rescuer to have set the victim up to fall over the cliff such that the two persons could develop a good relationship.<sup>236</sup> What it does imply, however, is that the unfortunate incident was put to good use and for a greater end, '*O' Felix Culpa*'. The problem with this analogy, however, is that it does not take into account God's foreknowledge of the creature falling over the cliff and becoming subsumed by sin and evil. When it is considered that God *originally* created the world in a way that he knew would make it prone to falling into a sinful and evil way of life, it is much more difficult to consider sin and evil as a factor that is *consequently* incorporated into God's creative purposes.

Although God's foreknowledge might have been able to prevent creatures from walking towards their cliff, this does not necessarily mean that the Fall was not inevitable nor does it imply that God's 'negligence' had the intent of manipulating creatures into a good relationship with him. It is not God's foreknowledge of a situation that causes it to take place but, moreover, the occurrence of a situation that causes God to have his foreknowledge. This being said, however, if it is suggested that God created a scenario that he knew would lead the fall-prone creatures (which he created as fall-prone) to submit to this inclination it becomes increasingly more difficult to deny God's culpability for the fallenness of creation. If God's creativity effectively set the world up to fall, how could creation not realise this destiny? Furthermore, how could God be considered in such circumstances as less than the architect of the Fall and this creator of the sin and evil that resulted from it?

To respond to this problem there needs to be a consideration of the priority of God's purposes for the world. If it is the case that God created the world with the

---

<sup>236</sup> Such a set up could be related to Munchausen syndrome by proxy, which is seen as a dysfunctional pathological condition.

ultimate priority of its having particular qualities that would consequently (and undesirably) lead to its becoming a fallen world, God would not need to be considered the architect of such fallenness. Rather, he would be considered to be the creator of a particular world in which short-term fallenness was a contingent matter of fact, an inevitability. Although this would make God indirectly responsible, it would not make him directly responsible. God would only be directly responsible for his priority of creating the particular world and willing for a particular relationship with it.<sup>237</sup> If sin and evil are understood as the mere *consequence* of God's particular decision making, God can only be considered to be indirectly responsible for such an inevitability. By making such a move, Barth undermines, on the one hand, the monist positions that connect sin and evil directly to God and his creative purposes and, on the other, the Manichean dualist positions that so remove God from the existence of sin and evil that they undermine his sovereignty

### 3.2 Barth on the Creature's Personal Autonomy

If it is the case that God created the world to have certain qualities that would lead it into its fallenness, should these qualities not in and of themselves be considered as evil and sinful? If God created the world to have a level of independent 'freedom' and autonomy, for example, which would inevitably lead to fallenness, should this 'freedom' not be considered to be sinful and evil? Given that living a life somewhat independently from God is not what creatures have been created for, this 'freedom' should be understood as sinful and evil. As Barth writes, "Sin... is posited with free self-development".<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, because having this 'freedom' and autonomy inevitably leads to a state of affairs that can only be described as sinful and evil, it is clearly appropriate to suggest that creation is not meant to live by this form of 'freedom'.<sup>239</sup> Despite that, for Barth, God's creation is wholly good and should not, therefore, be understood as sinful or evil, in and of itself.

---

<sup>237</sup> Under these circumstances, the priority of God's creating a particular world with particular qualities is understood to take precedence over his will to stop the temporary existence of sin and evil.

<sup>238</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p321.

<sup>239</sup> This state of affairs is sinful and evil not simply because they occur apart from God but because they conflict with the loving way of life that God intends for creation; a way of life that can only be discovered by living in full communion with God and by his grace. (Cf. Barth, *CD III.1*, 1958, p96).

The ‘partly independent’ existence of creation does not, in and of itself, however, imply sin and evil.<sup>240</sup> Moreover, the very fact that creation temporarily exists in such a state implies that God has ordained it. As Barth writes, “in so far as the consciousness of sin is a true element in our being, and to that extent sin is a reality for us, it is ordained by God as that which makes redemption necessary.”<sup>241</sup> Although the type of ‘freedom’ that inevitably leads to sin and evil has malevolent consequences, it is also a ‘freedom’ that can be considered to contribute towards the good of the creature. The positive consequence of creation having its own autonomy includes the potential, in Barth’s view, for creation genuinely to become *another*. This consequence, it will be suggested can only come about, however, if creation has, at least temporarily, been given the chance to lead its ‘own’ life<sup>242</sup>; in other words, if creation becomes subject to the dominion of *das Nichtige* (‘that which is not’ God). Barth writes,

The diversities and frontiers of the creaturely world contain many “nots.” No single creature is all-inclusive. None is or resembles another. To each belongs its own space and time, and in these its own manner, nature and existence. What we have called the “shadow side” of creation is constituted by the “not” which in this twofold respect, as its distinction from God and its individual distinctiveness, pertains to creaturely natures. On this shadow side the creature is contiguous to nothingness, for the “not” is at once the expression and frontier of the *positive will, election and activity of God*. When the creature crosses

---

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III*: 2, 1960, pp197-198.

<sup>241</sup> Barth, *CD III*.3, 1960, p322.

<sup>242</sup> This might seem to conflict with Barth’s understanding when he writes, “Nor does the creature exist for itself. It is not the creature itself but its Creator who exists and thinks and speaks and cares for the creature.” (Barth, *CD III*:1, 1958, p94.) And when he also writes, “It would be a strange love that was satisfied with the mere existence and nature of the other, then withdrawing, leaving it to its own devices.” (Ibid. p95.) In response to the first quote, a consideration is needed of Barth’s anthropology and his definition of what it means to be a creature. Barth writes, “the one creaturely being in whose existence we have to do immediately and directly with is the being of God.” (Barth, *CD III*:2, 1960, p32.) For Barth, a creature does not find its true essence as a creature when it exists for itself, but only when it exists for God. Therefore, the genuine creature does not exist for itself. In response to the second quote, for Barth, it would indeed be a “strange love that was satisfied with the mere existence and nature of the other, then withdrawing, leaving it to its own devices.” As such, God, for his own reasons, only *partly* and *temporarily* leaves creation to its ‘own’ devices, before ultimately raising it up into a new and eternal life of *koinonia* with him. This is the true and ultimate end that God has elected and prepared for his creation.

the frontier from the one side, and it is invaded from the other, nothingness achieves actuality in the creaturely world.<sup>243</sup>

When God created the world *ex nihilo* it is important to understand that, for Barth, it was created out of ‘that which is not God’ and therefore it must not be understood as begotten from God. In his understanding of creation *ex nihilo* Barth would seem to portray himself as a realist with respect to ‘*nihilo*’ or ‘*das Nichtige*’.<sup>244</sup> For Barth, *das Nichtige* would seem to have its own independent existence in its non-existence, a ‘being of non-being’; it is the ‘nothing else’ that existed with God prior to creation. By coming across as a realist in this seemingly paradoxical respect he is able to emphasise that there *really was* nothing else apart from God prior to creation.<sup>245</sup> As has been previously discussed, however, this non-existent existence can only be realised when the fallen creation comes into existence through the sin and evil that constitute *das Nichtige* and oppose God’s creative purposes.

Although Barth might seem to hold some form of realist stance with respect to *das Nichtige*, he does not seem to hold to a realist stance regarding sin and evil. When it comes to his understanding of sin and evil Barth would appear to be an anti-realist by holding that sin and evil are dependent upon the fallen creation for their existence. *Das Nichtige*, on the other hand, would not seem to be dependent upon the fallen creation for its existence, but only dependent upon the fallen creation for the realisation of its existence. By holding to a position that appears to be realist with respect to *das Nichtige* yet anti-realist with respect to sin and evil Barth appears to obviate all forms of monism or dualism. On the one hand, by holding that neither

---

<sup>243</sup> Barth *CD III.3*, 1960, pp349- 350 (emphasis mine).

<sup>244</sup> When discussing *das Nichtige* and sin and evil in realist and anti-realist terms, realism and anti-realism are being understood as they are defined by Edward Craig in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “A realist about Xs, for example, maintains that Xs (or facts or states of affairs involving them) exist independently of how anyone else thinks or feels about them; whereas an anti-realist holds that they are so dependent.” (Vol. 8, 1998, p116.) For example, with respect to humour a realist would hold that amusement has an eternal conceptual reality whether or not a person has ever been amused, whereas an anti-realist would hold that amusement only finds realisation if and when a person is amused.

<sup>245</sup> Although Barth’s understanding that *das Nichtige* only exists as the shadow of creation and the New creation could come across as implying an anti-realist understanding i.e. the existence of *das Nichtige* is dependent upon their being a creation to realise the shadow of *das Nichtige* (i.e. a ‘something else’ to realise the shadow of ‘nothing else’) this is not his intention. If a person has a ten-pound note and nothing else, that person does not need to receive another ten-pound note to realise that there was previously nothing else apart from the single ten-pound note. When Barth understands that *das Nichtige* only exists as the shadow of creation and the New creation he simply wants to emphasise the temporality of *das Nichtige*’s reign as it anticipates God’s ultimate victory over it.

creation nor sin and evil are ‘out of God’ but ‘out of nothing’ he denies monism, and, on the other hand, by holding that prior to creation it was only God that had an ‘existent existence’ he denies dualism.<sup>246</sup>

Although Barth does not endorse any form of dualism he does, however, seem to affirm a duality with respect to God and *das Nichtige*.<sup>247</sup> This dual relation affects, but does not incorporate creation. As such, it is not problematic to consider there to be a duality when there are three distinct forms of ‘existence’: God’s, Creation’s and *das Nichtige*’s. If this is the case, however, then the question arises as to where creation comes in this account? As was mentioned earlier, creation could almost be considered as being suspended between God and *das Nichtige*. This does not suggest that creation is half God and half *das Nichtige*; creation is clearly distinct from both of these. What it suggests is that creation is related both to God in its createdness and purpose and to *das Nichtige* in its fallenness and other-than-God-ness. It is this other-than-God-ness, which creation achieves from being ‘created out of’ and ‘subject to’ *das Nichtige* (that which is not God), that will be considered to be the fundamental contributing factor to God’s creation of *another* and a possible answer to why God permitted creation to fall prey to *das Nichtige*. By being created out of and subject to that which is not God, as opposed to being created out of and fully subject to him, God gives creation the opportunity to develop ‘out of’ and ‘into’ *another*.<sup>248</sup> Barth writes,

God created [the creature] “out of nothing,” that is, by distinguishing that which he willed from that which he did not will, and by giving its existence on the basis of that distinction. To that divine distinction it owes that fact that it is. And to the same distinction it owes the fact

---

<sup>246</sup> *Das Nichtige*, for Barth, has never had an actual existence, but has only ever existed in its non-existence.

<sup>247</sup> For the distinction between ‘dualism’ and ‘a dualist account’ see the previous footnote on p41.

<sup>248</sup> If God had originally created creatures to be animated by the Spirit (*soma pneumatikon* – 1 Cor. 15.44) then creatures would not have been able to develop their own particular identity and would have seemed very much like puppets. If, however, God temporarily gives creatures the opportunity to live a life apart from him, they will be able to develop an original identity and will become like sheep awaiting their shepherd, as opposed to dolls awaiting their puppeteer. It is arguably the case that a person’s distinctiveness and particularity from God is one thing that God cannot give a person, but that a person must attain for themselves.

that it can continue to be. By preserving the distinction God preserves the creature.<sup>249</sup>

By living a life subject to the dominion of *das Nichtige* and ‘that which is not God’, creation has been given the ‘freedom’ to come into its own and develop truly into *another*. This “autonomous reality [and]...freedom of individual action”<sup>250</sup> that God gives creation to become another is, for Barth, a good thing. However, although it was God who made the decision to give creation this autonomy and let it exist temporarily as prey to *das Nichtige*, this does not imply that everything which constitutes this existence is a part of God’s creative purposes. Furthermore, it does not imply that God is directly responsible for all that occurs within creation.<sup>251</sup> Parallels can be drawn here with the parable of the prodigal son and the father’s decision to respond to his son’s wishes and give him his inheritance early. Although it might have been the father who permitted his son to receive his inheritance early (for the justifiable reason of wanting to respond to his son’s free wishes), this does not imply that the father either intended or was responsible for the son’s squandering of his inheritance. The father’s decision in this parable does, however, have significant differences to God’s decision to give creation its own independent ‘freedom’. When God gave creation its autonomy he knew what it would do with it. Furthermore, he gave it to the world without it even asking. However, even if it were the case in this parable that the father knew the son would squander his inheritance and gave it to the son without his asking, this would still not make the father directly culpable for his son’s actions. It might make him indirectly responsible but this does not imply direct culpability. The son is still the one that is freely performing the wrong actions.

If it is the case that the father of the prodigal son could be considered to be irresponsible under these circumstances, could it not also be the case that God should be considered as being irresponsible when he gives the world its particular ‘freedom’, even if he is not considered directly culpable? Not if it is the case that in giving creation the ‘freedom’ to genuinely become *another* he was achieving a significant part of his plan for creation, which, as Barth would want to argue, he is.<sup>252</sup> Barth writes, “The creature does not belong and is not subject to him like a puppet or a tool

---

<sup>249</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p73.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. p87.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Wolterstorff, 1996, p601-602.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III:2*, 1960, pp92, 172.



or dead matter – that would certainly not be the lordship of the living God – but in the autonomy in which it was created, in the activity which God made possible for it and permitted to it.”<sup>253</sup> However, because creation’s essential destiny, as Barth writes, “is to live of and by the grace of God”<sup>254</sup>, creation’s present ungodly life would have also led to its inevitable destruction had it not been for God’s redemptive intervention.

What is important to grasp here is that by living this present ‘self-conscious’ life, creation experiences and discovers its own particularity. This experience should therefore be understood as nothing less than an experience that has been foreordained by God. It is, furthermore, a significant part of God’s creative purposes to develop the right relationship with his creature.<sup>255</sup> This relationship that God wills to develop with this *particular* creation, however, has the inevitable consequence of sin and evil. If God were to create the sort of world for communion with him that could not lead a sinful or evil existence it would be a fundamentally different creation from the creation that presently exists. As such, the question as to why God permitted creation to lead a sinful and evil existence directly corresponds to the question of why God wanted to create this particular creation for the right relationship with him. By taking this corresponding question into account it becomes apparent that God permits the existence of sin and evil in exchange for creating this particular created order and developing the right relationship with it. What Barth would seem to imply is that there is an apparent trade-off between God’s will to enter into a relationship with a particular *other* in exchange for his having to witness his creation fall subject to *das Nichtige* and all that for which it has not been elected. As Wolterstorff writes,

[Barth’s] move, like the free-will account as a whole, consists of viewing God as making a trade-off. Having defeated *das Nichtige* at the cross, God could have called to a halt its ingressions. But God did not, for reasons which in their totality are known to God alone; God permits *das Nichtige* to continue to work evil.<sup>256</sup>

What Wolterstorff should perhaps have added to this statement is that the omnipotent and omniscient God could have called a halt to the possible ingressions of

---

<sup>253</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p93 and cf. Barth, *CD II.1*, 1957, p508 and Rodin, 1997, p85.

<sup>254</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p80.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.2*, 1960, p127.

<sup>256</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, p605.

*das Nichtige* in his initial act of creation prior to them ever having the opportunity to develop. This being the case, the trade-off<sup>257</sup> was actually made by God prior to his defeating *das Nichtige* on the cross. This point is significant in order to affirm the full and eternal sovereignty of God when he initially permitted creation to become prey to *das Nichtige*. The original trade-off that God makes, however, is a trade-off that he is only willing to make temporarily and not eternally. This was made apparent when God came to counter his original trade-off with a further trade-off by sending his Son to suffer and die under the stranglehold of *das Nichtige* in order to raise his creation into communion with him, “to participate in the divine covenant of grace”<sup>258</sup>. In this exchange God makes creation’s situation his own through the incarnation of his Son Jesus Christ. In the incarnation God not only “ennobled [creation] and made it a promise”<sup>259</sup> but, in an *anhypostatic* (God-humanward) movement, also realised the possibility of communion between the transcendent God and the lowly creature. This counter trade-off is, for Barth, God’s answer to and, therefore, *the* answer to the problem of evil. It is from this forward-looking ‘*post Christum*’ perspective that creation can know that the alien powers of *das Nichtige* have been fully confronted<sup>260</sup> and overcome through the work of Christ. Rooted in this faith and hope creation can eagerly await the day when its freedom from *das Nichtige* will be fully realised. Barth writes,

There is, therefore, no further reason to be ashamed of our situation, nor to bewail it, nor to complain against God for putting us in this and not in some other situation... Hence it is no empty assertion when we say that the future honour and dignity and glory of the creature is reflected in its need. In fact its need means that the creature discovers

---

<sup>257</sup> The trade-off that is being made here is between his decision to ‘not call a halt to the ingressions of *das Nichtige* in his initial act of creation’ and his decision for ‘x’.

<sup>258</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p80.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.* p82.

<sup>260</sup> When Christ died on the cross he experienced the very worst of suffering and evil at the hands of *das nichtige*; he saw the burden of *das Nichtige* in all its fullness (Cf. Barth, *CD IV.1*, 1956, p266 and *CD IV.2*, 1956, p487.). In so doing he stood alongside creation and compassionately made the problem of sin and evil his own. Through this *anhypostatic* movement God came to really know his enemy and was, thus, able to confront and defeat it once and for all. This defeat abridged the vast *chorismos* that separated creatures from God and, as such, made it possible for creatures participate in the person of Christ and the *enhypostatic* (human-Godward) movement.

itself as such at the very place where in Jesus Christ God himself entered in to save it.<sup>261</sup>

When creation is ultimately delivered from bondage to *das Nichtige* and enters into a new life of communion with God it will ‘function properly’ i.e. as it was created to. Creatures will become empowered and animated by the Holy Spirit (*soma pneumatikon*) (1 Cor. 15.42-45). They will move beyond their own otherness and proud individuality to love as they were created to love. In this transition, powerfully articulated through the metaphor of ‘rebirth’, creatures will become like little children who are warmly embraced by the Father into a new life under his grace. Although this transformation and renewal might imply an element of discontinuity, God also wills for a radical continuity between the old and new creation. God’s creative plan for his creatures and the world they inhabit, does not, however, involve annihilation in preparation for a reattempt at creating a better world *ex nihilo*. It is orientated, indeed, towards transformation, reconciliation and what might be termed as recreation *ex creatione*. The consummation of God’s creative purposes is, to reiterate, not characterised by surrender and defeat, as the former would imply, but is rooted in his loving purpose and steadfast persistence for his original creation – his “plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him on heaven and earth” (Eph. 1.10). As such, God does not overwhelm the distinctions that distinguish him from creation but abridges them such that he can become united with creation in communion. Upon achieving this unity, God does not undermine the particularity between him and his creation but preserves it. For Barth, when God creates the creature it “does not exist casually. It does not merely exist, but exists meaningfully. In its existence it realises a purpose a plan and order...This is already implied in the fact that it is a creature and therefore the work of the Creator, of God.”<sup>262</sup> When God created creatures he purposefully created them as individuals distinct from him such that he would be able to raise them into a genuine communal relationship with him. Barth writes,

In the language of the New Testament, *koinonia* or *communicatio* is a relationship between two persons in which these are brought into perfect mutual coordination within the framework of a definite order,

---

<sup>261</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p82.

<sup>262</sup> Barth, *CD III.1*, 1960, p229.

yet with no destruction of their two-sided identity and particularity but rather in its confirmation and expression.<sup>263</sup>

### 3.3 What Effects Can *Das Nichtige* Have on Creation?

This brings us to the question of what effects *das Nichtige* can have on creation? In other words, what aspects of this world can be understood as sinful and evil? Sin and evil, it could be said, are the consequent malfunction that creation experiences when it does not function in the manner for which it was created, that is, to exist in communion with and within the full grace of God. This does not suggest, however, that it is the independent existence of creation that is sinful and evil. Creation, as God has created it, is a good thing. What it suggests is that the existence of creation apart from God leads to a sinful and evil situation. Sin and evil are, as it were, the inevitable *consequence* that arises when creation exists semi-independently from God. By understanding sin and evil in these terms Barth is not adhering to a monist position and holding God to be the author of sin and evil but holding him to be the creator of a world which is freely able to fall captive to sin and evil. As such Barth is placing the root of sin and evil within creation itself and holding it to be the inevitable result of God permitting creation to exist temporarily apart from him. Sin and evil develop as the result of creation's semi-independence, its subjection to *das Nichtige*, and *not* as a direct result of its createdness.<sup>264</sup> To speak analogously, it is not God that painfully injects sin and evil into creation but creation itself through its own self-condemnation.<sup>265</sup> In this exposition of sin and evil, Barth understands *das Nichtige* as the void that exists where God does not fully embrace creation; it is the void that implies creation's existence in *less than* full communion with God.

The effect or result of *das Nichtige* having this grasp over creation is, as we have seen, to cause it to malfunction. This malfunction, however, is not a problem that Barth thinks creation needs to dwell on but, moreover, a problem that has already

---

<sup>263</sup> Barth, *CD IV.3*, 1961, p535.

<sup>264</sup> The understanding that the world was created for the purpose of being in communion with God should not be considered to entail that God created the world such that the uncreated realities of sin and evil would arise if creation existed apart from him apart from him. Moreover, it implies that sin and evil are the direct *consequence* of the particular created reality God chose to create and gave the opportunity to exist apart from him. Under these circumstances, sin and evil are an indirect result of God's creativity.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.3*, 1961, pp305-306, 321-322.

been overcome in Jesus Christ. As John Webster writes, “Barth is generally only interested in sin *post Christum*... [This] means that Barth refuses to treat sin as other than a reality that has already been accused, condemned, and abolished in Jesus Christ: its existence is that of a defeated reality, an ‘impossible possibility’.”<sup>266</sup> Creation should therefore exist in a state of anticipation, looking forward with hope to the *Eschaton* when it will ultimately be transformed and raised to its proper function and fulfilment by the grace of God. Barth writes,

What is nothingness? In the knowledge and confession of the Christian faith, i.e., looking retrospectively to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and prospectively to his coming again, there is only one possible answer. Nothingness is in the past, the ancient menace, danger and destruction, the ancient non-being which obscured and defaced the divine creation of God but which is consigned to the past in Jesus Christ, in whose death it has received its deserts, being destroyed with this consummation of the positive will of God which is as such the end of His non-willing.<sup>267</sup>

Creation, in its blindness, cannot fully realise what the effects of *das Nichtige* are, nor can it realise their full seriousness. It therefore depends on Scripture, given to it in Providence, for the guidance to show it the true way and for the Spirit to give it the eyes to see the trueness of this way.<sup>268</sup> Certain things can, however, be understood as the consequence of living in a world that is subject to the dominion of *das Nichtige*. Take, for example, the limitations that consume this world in its insufficiency, i.e. the pain and suffering, the battles for survival, moral evil, disease, natural disasters etc. All these things result from Creation’s inability to live self-sufficiently i.e. to live without the fully nourishing hands of God.<sup>269</sup> Given this incapacity, creation leads a very different life from the one it would lead were it to exist (and will lead when it exists) in full communion with God. It lives in a world that struggles with limitation, impediment, decay, indigence, failure and ultimately

---

<sup>266</sup> Webster, 2003, p67.

<sup>267</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p363.

<sup>268</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap. 16 (accessed 2008).

<sup>269</sup> Cf. Wolterstorff, 1996, p587.

the prospect of death;<sup>270</sup> it lives in a world that is defined by bondage to the dominion of *das Nichtige*.<sup>271</sup>

This being said, however, although such things as pain and suffering can be understood as the consequence of living in a world consumed by *das Nichtige*, this does not necessarily mean that they should be classified as sinful and evil. As Barth writes, “it is irrefutable that creation and creature are good *even in the fact* that all that exists in this contrast and antithesis.”<sup>272</sup> For Barth, not all the seemingly negative aspects and limitations of creaturely existence need to be interpreted as sinful or evil.<sup>273</sup> They could, for example, be recognised as a gift created by God and given to creation in order to help it to survive and exist within this fallen state because, as Augustine notes, “it is worse to rejoice iniquity than to bewail corruption”.<sup>274</sup> As Wolterstorff also writes, in parallel with Barth, “It is part of our design plan, part of being a properly-functioning human being, that we should dislike pain, suffering, loss, failure, infirmity, that we should experience them negatively. And it’s a well-nigh inevitable consequence of creatures with our design plan living in a world of this present sort that we should *in fact* experience pain, suffering, loss, failure, infirmity... These negative experiences are not as such, evils. To creatures of our sort, living in a world of this present sort, experiencing these sorts of things, and experiencing them negatively, God said Yes.”<sup>275</sup> What Barth continually wants to affirm, as Wolterstorff rightly interprets him, is the goodness and purposefulness of creation *as* God has created it.<sup>276</sup> For Barth, even the negatively perceived aspects of Creation should be praised. He writes,

For all we can tell, may not His creatures praise him more mightily in humility than in exaltation, in need than in plenty, in fear than in joy, on the frontier of nothingness than when wholly orientated on God... on bad days than on good, more surely in sorrow than in rejoicing, more truly in adversity than in progress?... How surprised we shall be, and how ashamed of so much improper and

---

<sup>270</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p297.

<sup>271</sup> Cf. Wolterstorff, 1996, p588.

<sup>272</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p297, (emphasis mine).

<sup>273</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* p85.

<sup>274</sup> Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good*, chap. 20 (accessed 2008).

<sup>275</sup> Wolterstorff, 1996, pp593-594.

<sup>276</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.1*, 1960 p229.

unnecessary unquiet and discontent, once we are brought to realise that all creation both as light and shadow, including our own share in it... was laid on Jesus Christ as the creation of God, and even though we did not see it, without and in spite of us, and while we were shaking our heads that things were not very different, it sang the praise of God just as it was, and was therefore right and perfect.<sup>277</sup>

The creature's incapacity to recognise truly what sin and evil are, and its consequent inability to distinguish the good things in creation from sin and evil reiterate creation's need for the atonement. Creation is not only dependent on Christ for redemption from sin, but is also dependent on Christ as 'the Judge judged in our place',<sup>278</sup> to reveal the reality of what sin and evil are in all their seriousness. Barth writes, "That we are sinners, and what our sin is, is something we can never know by reflection about ourselves in the light of a standard good and evil which we have freely chosen or discovered... We have to learn it where God Himself has told it to us by taking so seriously the accusation against us in our corruption that he took upon Himself in His Son, that he willed to encounter us as the man corrupted and accused."<sup>279</sup> Creatures should not, because they cannot, engage in any *self*-attempts to try and understand what sin and evil are. Such questions, which creatures in their blindness are incapable of answering, should not be speculated over and any attempt to do so would be to engage in a form of natural theology that would inevitably lead to ill-conceived and misguided answers. Barth describes this state of confusion as "a triumph of nothingness."<sup>280</sup> If creatures want to develop any knowledge of sin and evil they must look solely to Scripture for guidance on how to be obedient to God and for the answer of how sin and evil have been overcome in Christ. Otherwise, creation should accept its naïveté and in this naïveté persevere onward, praising God for the wonders of his creation. It should march forth, energised with the hope and guidance given to it in revelation and live with eager longing for the glory that is 'not worth comparing to the sufferings of this present time' (Rom. 8.18-27). Barth writes,

---

<sup>277</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p297.

<sup>278</sup> Barth, *CD IV.1*, 1956, p211ff.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid. p240..

<sup>280</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p299.

The creature must not exist like the unhappy centre of a circle which has no periphery. It must exist in a genuine circle, its individual environment. It must not exist everywhere, but in a specific place. It must not exist endlessly, but in its own time. It must not comprehend or understand or be capable of or accomplish everything. It has freedom to experience and accomplish that which is proper to it, to do that which it can do, and to be satisfied. It is in this freedom that it is preserved by God. It is in this freedom that it comes directly from God and moves towards Him. It is in this freedom that it is read to fulfil its destiny, i.e., by the grace of God to live by the grace of God. The fact that it is here and now, that it exists in one way and not another, is its opportunity; the one opportunity which does not recur; an opportunity that corresponds to the oneness of God and the uniqueness of the work of liberation which he accomplished in Jesus Christ. It is its own particular opportunity, the opportunity which is given specifically to it, the opportunity which is definitely rich and pregnant with promise. As this opportunity is given to it, the creature is preserved by God for the kingdom of God.<sup>281</sup>

### *3.4 God's Compassion for His Creation*

When Barth writes, "The creature must not exist like the unhappy centre of a circle which has no periphery"<sup>282</sup> the question arises as to whether he is suggesting that the creature should simply accept its situation, namely one that is consumed by sin and evil, and see this as 'its opportunity'. To a certain extent this is what he is implying. However, he is not suggesting that God has no compassion for the creature's present situation. Throughout Scripture there is ongoing and rightful lamentation for the world as it is consumed by sin and evil, particularly pre-Christ in the Psalms, Job and Lamentations. In Psalm 22.1-2, for example, the psalmist writes, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from my words of groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by

---

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. p85.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.



night, but find no rest.”<sup>283</sup> The initial words of this Psalm, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’, are carried into the New Testament when Jesus Christ cries them out on the cross (Matthew, 27.46, Mark 15.34). In this moment in particular, but also throughout Christ’s life sufferings, God makes the world’s lamentations and the problem of evil his own.<sup>284</sup> As Barth describes, “Jesus did not run away from the state and situation of the fallen man, but took it upon Himself, lived it and bore it himself as the eternal Son of God.”<sup>285</sup> He did this, Barth writes, by being “exposed to real inward temptation and trial... [by crying] to God and [wrestling] with God in real inward need.”<sup>286</sup> These words of Barth correspond to the verses in Hebrews 5.7-8,

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Christ’s expressions of suffering and anguish are marked by his utmost faith in his Father. When, in Mark 14.36, Jesus speaks to his Father in anticipation of his crucifixion, he prays ‘Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; *yet not what I want, but what you want.*’ Jesus does not face the inevitability of his suffering and death with an enthused outlook towards his ascension but as Barth writes, “[the New Testament portrays] the obedience of Jesus throughout as a genuine struggle to obey.” It is not without struggle that Barth thinks the world should face the problem of evil, but with this Christocentric faith in God’s greatest of all plans for his creation.

Barth’s depiction of how Christ anticipates his death draws close parallels with that of Oscar Cullman’s who, in his book *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead*, compares the death of Socrates to the death of Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>283</sup> Cf. Psalms 6, 12, 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129.

<sup>284</sup> When Christ cries out ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ he is asking a question that corresponds to the question that has always seemed to eat at the heart of both the Christian and Jewish followers – why does the omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God permit evil to exist in the world?

<sup>285</sup> Barth, *CD I.2*, 1960m p158.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.* and cf. Barth, *CD IV.1*, 1956, p271ff., John 12.27 and Heb. 2.9.

He writes, “[In anticipation of death] there is Socrates, calmly and composedly speaking of the immortality of the soul; here Jesus, weeping and crying.”<sup>287</sup> When Jesus died “[he] underwent death in all its horror, not only in his body but also in his soul.”<sup>288</sup> He was filled with the fear of dying because “whoever is in the hands of death is no longer in the hands of God, but in the hands of God’s enemy.”<sup>289</sup> Socrates, on the other hand, died with calm composure, eagerly awaiting liberation from his physical body and the transition from the realm of particulars to the realm of universals. It could be argued that part of the reason there is such a contrast between Socrates’ and Jesus’ anticipation of death was because Jesus’ experience was fraught with pain over and against the calm passing of Socrates. However, it is clear that the fears of Jesus were not simply anxieties over physical suffering from his final cries in Mark 15.34. In this verse his suffering and despair are portrayed as deep within his soul.

Like Cullman, Barth also compares Jesus’ anticipation of his death to that of Socrates. However, when Barth makes his comparison he does not just compare Christ’s anticipation of death to that of Socrates but also to “so many a Christian martyr.”<sup>290</sup> Although there are clear differences, as Cullman has shown, between Socrates’ “glad resignation”<sup>291</sup> and Christ’s anticipation of death, it is much more difficult to see why Barth would also want to affirm that such a difference lies between Christ’s anticipation of death and ‘so many a Christian martyr’. As Barth writes, “It is obviously not simply a matter of suffering and dying in itself.”<sup>292</sup> What, for Barth, so clearly distinguishes Christ’s anticipation of death is that “He saw this world as it was. He saw what it was that dominated and was fulfilled in it. He saw and felt the “great burden of the world.” He saw...that this burden is overwhelming, that in the last resort it can only overwhelm and crush Himself and other men.”<sup>293</sup> Furthermore, he knew that in his dying “there [would be] no one to bear the burden with Him.”<sup>294</sup> For Barth, it is in this situation that,

---

<sup>287</sup> Cullmann, 1958, p24.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. p25.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. p23.

<sup>290</sup> Barth, *CD IV.I*, 1956, p265.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.p266.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.p267.

No man but Jesus has ever known the true breadth and depth, the true essence and darkness of human misery. What we see and note and know and more or less painfully experience of it is only the shadow of His cross touching us... We cannot see it in the terror and doubt and despair which may come on us. Or we can see at as these only as a distant recollection of the misery of which he has made an end in his death; only as a weak echo of his cry; only as a sign that we are truly in him, and therefore share his sufferings. We have no direct experience of it. We cannot speak of it as though it were an element in our own history.<sup>295</sup>

What Christ experiences and fears is the fullness of what it means to be alone and to exist under the dominion of *das Nichtige*.<sup>296</sup> To reiterate Cullman's words, Christ was filled with the fear of dying because "whoever is in the hands of death is no longer in the hands of God, but in the hands of God's enemy."<sup>297</sup> Creatures only distantly experience this subjection to *das Nichtige* and when they experience it they cannot even come close to understanding its seriousness. Moreover, they find themselves constantly embracing and grasping onto it. Creation, however, will never have to experience *das Nichtige* in the fullness that Christ had to because in Christ's death and resurrection he overcame its dominion and prepared a new way for creation that will ultimately be realised in its consummation. This new way, which has been brought about by God's victory over the alien power that has consumed creation, means that creation needs to undergo a complete renewal. As Cullman writes, "If life is to issue out of so genuine a death as this, a new divine act of creation is necessary."<sup>298</sup> For Cullman, "The contrast for the Christian is... between the creation delivered over to death by sin and new creation."<sup>299</sup> On the one hand, this destruction of the old creation, and the institution of the new and eternal creation make this resurrection of the dead into new life a fundamentally discontinuous movement. On the other hand, however, the definition of this movement as the consummation of God's *original* creative act also makes it a radically continuous movement.

---

<sup>295</sup> Barth, *CD IV.2*, 1956, p487.

<sup>296</sup> This is not to suggest that Christ actually was alone i.e. separate from the Father and the Spirit. It is to suggest that he experienced the fullness of what it means to be alone.

<sup>297</sup> Cullmann, 1958. p23.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. pp25-26.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid. p31.

The affirmative answer ‘yes’ to the question of whether the world simply needs to accept its fallen situation and stop being confounded by the problem of sin and evil is given with the understanding that it is a problem that has already been answered and overcome in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>300</sup> Creation no longer needs to dwell in a state of confusion concerning the problem of evil and should no longer look at it as a problem that genuinely challenges the Christian faith. For the world to continue to be challenged by the problem is, for Barth, a triumph for the dominion of *das Nichtige*.<sup>301</sup> This is particularly apparent when it is considered that sin and evil tend to be problem that challenges not the reign of *das Nichtige* but the reign of God. The world’s confusion over and blaming of God for the problem of evil is nothing short of puzzling. It is like the person who has been suffering from extreme thirst in the desert and then chooses to blame the person who will ultimately quench their thirst. It is nothing less than biting off the hand that feeds it.

What Barth wants to affirm is that God is not directly responsible for the existence of sin and evil but is only responsible for creating a world in which it could exist. What God is directly responsible for, however, is his bringing the existence of sin and evil to an end. With this knowledge Barth suggests that a strong hope should dwell with and uplift the world as it cries its tears of suffering. The Christian faith, Barth would want to affirm, although it might know and experience the weeping that lingers in the night, can also know of the joy that comes with the morning (Psalm 30.5).<sup>302</sup> N.T. Wright articulates this perceptively when he suggests that a Christian believer should be considered as someone who gets up very early, while it is still dark before dawn.<sup>303</sup> In Scripture, the successive lamentations are generally written within a context of hope and anticipation grounded in a faith in God’s promise, his unending goodness, and his persistent faithfulness to his creation. Barth writes,

His merciful will was to take up the cause of the creature against the non-existent, not from the safe height of a supreme world-governor, but in the closest possible proximity, with the greatest possible directness, i.e., Himself to become a creature. He placed himself

---

<sup>300</sup> This is perhaps the reason that most of the lamentations in Scripture would seem to be found pre-Christ’s death and resurrection.

<sup>301</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p299.

<sup>302</sup> For Barth, “The Psalmists are aware of God’s absence not although, but precisely because, they are in a position to confess and glorify his presence.” Barth, *CD I.2*, 1960, p29.

<sup>303</sup> In reference to Thess. 5:4-8. - Wright, 2003, p216.

within the contradiction. He drew to himself and bore away the whole enmity and problem and power of the non-existent... This is the eternal will of God fulfilled and accomplished once and for all in time in Jesus Christ. And in the light of this will and work we have to regard the question of the *conservatio* of the creature as one which has already been decided.”<sup>304</sup>

---

<sup>304</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, pp78-79.

## IV. Conclusion

In Plantinga's monist understanding of the role of sin and evil within God's creative purposes, Plantinga seeks to provide a philosophically logical account of why evil exists in the world. Barth, on the other hand, by adhering neither to monism nor to dualism, which Hick describes as "the only two wholly consistent solutions that are possible"<sup>305</sup>, provides an account that would seem to be riddled with paradoxes and loose ends. This may be argued to reflect not Barth's folly but his genius, however. Whereas Plantinga might provide a philosophically cogent account, it is much more difficult to recognise it as a biblically viable account. Barth, on the other hand, while being less prepared to engage in the type of theodicy in which Plantinga chooses to engage, is able to provide an account that seems to be much more consistent with the knowledge given to the world in special revelation. Furthermore, although there appear to be paradoxes in Barth's account this does not conceal an underlying theological rigour and consistency.

Barth's humility and reverence are apparent in his willingness to admit to the creature's blindness and inability to answer and understand some of the questions with which Scripture presents us. Unlike Plantinga, he is unwilling to make any non-scripturally-informed presuppositions or to engage in the sort of second-guessing that characterises natural theology.<sup>306</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that Plantinga's engaging in this sort of theodicy is unjustified or unconstructive. It could be argued that it is only by considering certain logical and non-scripturally-driven possibilities that Christians are able to counter and engage the sort of atheistic thinkers and philosophers who challenge Christianity from outside the Christian sphere and attempt to undermine the mission of the church. The problem with Plantinga's *Felix Culpa* and free-will defense approaches, however, is that they would seem to be less concerned with engaging in a specifically *Christian* apologetics and more concerned with engaging in a more general theistic apologetics.<sup>307</sup> In so doing they appear at

---

<sup>305</sup> Hick, 1977, p21.

<sup>306</sup> It could be argued that his *das Nichtige* conceptuality finds very little, if any, support in Scripture. If this is the case, this does not mean that he can be accused of cutting off the branch he sitting on. By bringing in the *das Nichtige* conceptuality, which finds strong grounding in the Augustinian tradition and the fundamentally Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, he is able to articulate the rest of his thoughts in a clearly scripturally affirmative manner.

<sup>307</sup> This is not to deny that there are Christian principles which shape Plantinga's account such as, for example, his incorporation of the atonement and the incarnation in his *Felix Culpa* article. However,

times to brush over some key Scriptural assertions and risk conclusions which are in tension with the thrust of Scripture. In this regard, Plantinga could be considered as confusing rather than helping a faithful church dogmatics.

This illustrates the extent to which a ‘generally theistic’ and a ‘Christian’ apologetic will not always be mutually consistent for the simple reason that Christian thought makes more specific assertions than mere theism.<sup>308</sup> If Plantinga had been more focused on engaging with the specific details that Christian apologetics requires, he might have developed his two approaches in a more scripturally informed manner. Barth, for example, was still able to develop a *Felix Culpa* approach and ‘free’-will account from a more *Christian* perspective by simply including and taking into account a few additional scriptural tenets. For the Christian thinker, Christian and theistic apologetics should go hand in hand and they should both find their grounding in Scripture. By readily engaging in a more exegetically informed and driven approach (from his specifically Christian epistemic base<sup>309</sup>), it is possible that Plantinga’s position might have been closer to Barth’s. Furthermore, his arguably more theoretical approach might have meant that he would have been able to develop an account that was more oriented towards some of the problems facing the mission of the Christian Church in the present. For example, his account might have been more pertinent to the audience of contemporary atheistic philosophers.

By seeming to engage in a more general theistic apologetics, Plantinga would appear to sacrifice three fundamental Scriptural assertions in particular –

1. By understanding sin and evil as an intended means to the actualisation of God’s ultimate creative purposes he appears to undermine Scripture’s ongoing emphasis on the genuine malevolence of sin and evil. He risks, in other words, calling “evil good and good evil” (Is. 5.20). Such a move would also seem to disregard God’s

---

even in this article he would seem to be more concerned with arguing for the existence of God vis-à-vis evil than providing an account that retains adequate consistency with Christian Scripture (even although he is taking into account the atonement and incarnation). This is made apparent when he makes the sacrifice of considering evil as a fundamental part of (and, therefore, ultimate good and associate in) God’s creative purposes, in favour of trying to argue for God’s existence in the face of the problem of evil.

<sup>308</sup> Christian apologetics will, of course, always be consistent with the cause of the theistic apologists because one of its specific assertions is that a god exists. However, theistic apologetics will not always be consistent with and sympathetic to Christian apologetics and its specific assertions for the simple reason that this is not a requirement of this more general discipline.

<sup>309</sup> Cf. Plantinga, 1984.

whole-hearted confrontation of and opposition to the sin and evil of this present world that confronts God in his ultimate creative purposes.<sup>310</sup> As Kevin Diller notes with respect to Plantinga's formulation of the *Felix Culpa* theodicy, "in a *Felix Culpa* theodicy God *desires* evil as a means to his good purposes. This move has a dangerously distorting moral and theological impact. We can no longer condemn evil and injustice as wholly antithetical to what is good. Evil is ultimately the will of God...in the *Felix Culpa* theodicy it is the *evil itself* that is essential to the greater good. Evil is made reasonable as a functional good."<sup>311</sup>

2. By presenting sin and evil as being God's ally, he makes it very difficult to understand the biblical metaphor of God's victory over sin and death (i.e. 1 Cor. 15.54-57).

3. By seeming to define true freedom as being free from external influence, he would seem to undermine Scripture's understanding (particularly in Romans) that true freedom is found by becoming subject to God. It also makes it very difficult to make sense of the transformative processes of redemption and reconciliation, as Scripture presents them, without holding them to be processes that are invasive of, as opposed to 'fundamental for', humanity's freedom.

In all three respects Plantinga's account would seem to be incompatible with Barth's. This being said, however, the line that distinguishes these two Christian thinkers is not always as clear as it might seem. For example, both Christian thinkers hold that God is not the direct cause of sin and evil. For Plantinga, sin and evil are the result of the creature's misuse of its particular 'contra-causal' freedom and for Barth, sin and evil are the result of the creature's being subject to the dominion of *das Nichtige*. The line that distinguishes Barth and Plantinga, in this context, becomes even hazier when it is considered that for Barth *das Nichtige* is essentially nothing. As such, when Barth is referring to the creature's subjection to *das Nichtige*, he is

---

<sup>310</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, pp126-127.

<sup>311</sup> Diller, 2008, p96.



simply saying that the creature is partly<sup>312</sup> subject to nothing other than, of course, itself.<sup>313</sup> If this were simply the case, the difference separating the two on this matter might seem to be simply a semantic one. This would then raise the question as to why, if the difference really is semantic, Barth did not simply refer to creation as being partly subject to itself<sup>314</sup>, instead of bringing in the confusing conceptuality of *das Nichtige*.

I have argued that it is Barth's non-dualistic emphasis on duality, expressed by means of the concept of *das Nichtige*, that keeps him from the type of monist approach to which Plantinga adheres. If, however, *das Nichtige* is essentially nothing, then the question arises as to whether Barth is not, in actual fact, adhering to some form of monism. Surely if it is merely the semantics of *das Nichtige* that separates Barth from a monist understanding, then to all intents and purposes there is actually 'nothing' separating him from this type of approach. This, however, is not the case. As has been discussed throughout this thesis, although for Barth *das Nichtige* is essentially nothing it is also something very real, which exists "in opposition to the totality of God's creation"<sup>315</sup>. By using the conceptuality of *das Nichtige* to refer to this reality, Barth was able to provide, among others, three important emphases that clearly distinguish him from the monist understanding of Plantinga's –

1. He was able to move away from an understanding that creation is inherently sinful and evil, without pushing him to suggest that sin and evil are ultimately a good part of creation. On the one hand, by showing that creation is created perfect to live in full communion with God, Barth is able to emphasise creation's inherent goodness. On the other hand, however, by also taking into account that the world presently lives outside this full communion in a life oriented towards itself (by being subject to *das Nichtige*), Barth is able to explain why

---

<sup>312</sup> Again, it is important to reiterate that, for Barth, creation never exists completely independent from God (Cf. Barth, *CD III:1*, 1958, p94).

<sup>313</sup> For a creature to be subject to itself is for it to exist in a state of inward focus and egocentricity. This is closely connected to Martin Luther's account of sin in terms of *incurvatus in se* (being curved in upon oneself) as opposed to being curved outward toward God and neighbour (*excurvatus ex se*).

<sup>314</sup> To re-clarify, a creature can be 'partly subject' by, on the one hand, being subject to their own sinful desires and, on the other hand, being subject to God's continual preservation. A creature can be 'subject to itself' by living by its own sinful desires (animated by the flesh - *soma psychikon*) as opposed to living in Christ, by the Spirit, subject to the grace of God (animated by the Spirit - *soma pneumatikon*).

<sup>315</sup> Barth, *CD III.3*, 1960, p310.

there is sin and evil in the world without associating them with God's ultimate intentions.<sup>316</sup> For Barth, sin and evil exist in the world because God gives creation the opportunity to lead a short-term existence that is not the way it has ultimately been created to i.e. within the full embrace of God.

2. It meant that he could consider sin and evil in truly negative terms in relation to God's creative purposes. That is, positively creation exists as it was created to be - within the full embrace of God. Negatively creation does not exist as it was created to be – without the full embrace of God. It could be said that the conceptuality of *das Nichtige* provided a flip side to the coin of God's creative purposes<sup>317</sup> - a duality that made sin and evil alien from God's plan for creation.

3. It meant he was able to refer to scripture's account of creation being in bondage and subjection to an *alien* and *adverse* power (over which God could achieve a real victory (as opposed to a manipulated one)). If Barth had chosen to refer to 'creation as being in bondage to itself', he would have essentially been making the same suggestion. However, by using this 'bondage to self' language he would have made it much easier for his position to be misinterpreted. For example, if creation is considered as created good by God, it can become very easy to move to a monist understanding which misinterprets sin and evil as a part of this created good. If, however, the conceptuality of *das Nichtige* is brought into the equation, it becomes much easier to consider there to be a 'real' adversary to God's creative purposes, which, as 'nothingness', does not undermine God's sovereignty. By introducing this adversary into his thought, Barth was able to articulate clearly the fundamental point that sin and evil have a basis apart from God.

By adopting the (albeit potentially challenging) conceptuality of *das Nichtige*, Barth was able to portray a duality between God and an adversary that is *other* from him (*das Nichtige*). In so doing he was also able to use the semantics of *das Nichtige*

---

<sup>316</sup> It is important to note here that he is not attempting to explain how sin and evil come into existence, but explaining how it is possible for them to exist alongside an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God.

<sup>317</sup> Heads – creation as it subject to God, and tails – creation as it is subject to *das Nichtige*.

to articulate some key assertions about the discontinuity in God's transformative plan for his creatures without suggesting a change in God's intentions for his creatures. That is, he avoids any suggestions that God creates his creatures to be sinful and then changes his mind and transforms them to become sinless. Instead he presents *das Nichtige* as an adversary to God to which he was able to use to attach the depraved and therefore discontinuous elements. So when God brings an end to (makes discontinuous) the fallen aspect of his creation, he brings to an end the dominion of 'something' other from him – *das Nichtige*. So, for example, in his account of freedom he was able to portray creatures as presently living by a freedom characterised by slavery to sin and freedom from righteousness (Rom. 6.20) as a result of being subject to *das Nichtige*. He was then able to present God as coming to redeem creatures from their bondage to decay (at the hands of *das Nichtige*) and transform them into a new life with "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8.21), which is characterised by a freedom from sin and a slavery to righteousness (Rom. 6.18).<sup>318</sup> What distinguishes these two forms of freedom is whether a person is subject to *das Nichtige* or is subject to God. What this suggests is that there is a duality that is defined by what a person is subject to. Therefore, when a person moves from being subject to *das Nichtige* to become wholly subject to the grace of God they experience the discontinuous aspect of God's transformative plan.

As has been suggested a couple of times in this thesis, this fallen creation could be considered as being suspended between God and *das Nichtige*: it is related to God in its createdness and purpose but is also related to *das Nichtige* in its fallenness and other-than-God-ness. When creatures are transformed there is an element to their fallen being that comes to an end in order to make way for a new form of existence. For example, as was considered above, the creature's present freedom (in subjection to *das Nichtige*) comes to an end in order to make way for a new freedom in Christ. On a more general level, when creatures are transformed their fallenness (which associates them with *das Nichtige* and unrighteousness) comes to an end in order to make way for the consummation of their created purpose (which associates them with God and righteousness).

Although for a transformation to take place there needs to be an element of discontinuity, there also needs to be an element of continuity (otherwise x would not

---

<sup>318</sup> Cf. Barth, *CD IV:1*, 1956, p43.

become a new x, but would become y). As such, when God redeems creatures, they continue to exist in their createdness (as they are related to God) and also in their particularity/other-then-God-ness (as they were originally related to *das Nichtige*<sup>319</sup>). In this transformative process creation moves away from its relationship to *das Nichtige* towards a fuller relationship with God. This is how God's transformation of the world should be understood: a process that, through the person of Christ, delivers creation out of exile in this present world (as it is consumed by *das Nichtige*) and into the new home that has been prepared for it in communion with God. As the author of Ephesians expresses it, "So [Christ] came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (2.17-19).

When contrasting Barth to Plantinga, one of the key distinctions that would seem to arise is what they consider to be the means, ends and 'unwilled but inevitable' consequences of God's creative purposes. For Barth, sin and evil should fundamentally not be considered as a predetermined part of or means of God's creative purposes, but as an unwilled and inevitable consequence of his particular plan for creation. Barth would also want to affirm that 'contra-causal' freedom and the atonement, which deliver creation from sin and evil, are a predetermined means to the end of developing the right relationship (at-one-ment) with God. Plantinga, however, would seem to want to consider sin and evil as a desired part of God's creative purposes, brought about by his giving creation its particular 'contra-causal' freedom. They are, furthermore, the directly intended and desired means through which God could bring about the ends of contra-causal freedom and the atonement, which are definitive of the right relationship as willed by God.<sup>320</sup>

One of the underlying themes in this essay is that God is a god who creates with purpose and it is in this purpose that the world finds its meaning. As Barth writes, "[the creature's] destiny lies in the purpose of its Creator as the One Who speaks and cares for it. The creature's right and meaning and goal and purpose and

---

<sup>319</sup> Creatures do not need to remain subject to *das Nichtige* in order to retain their particularity.

<sup>320</sup> Plantinga would seem to imply that the 'good-making characteristic' of the atonement is its capacity to induce a feeling of indebtedness within a response to God's unrivalled display of love and mercy (Cf. Plantinga in Van Inwagen, 2004, pp7-11), as opposed to its capacity to achieve the right relationship between God and his creation. Cf. Diller, 2008, p92.

dignity lie – only – in the fact that God as the Creator has turned toward it with His purpose.”<sup>321</sup> This theme is one that runs throughout the Bible, from Genesis through to Revelation. When the Israelites left Egypt on their journey to the Promised Land, God had a purpose to bring them *out of exile* into their new home in the household of God; and when God created this present world to live as it does, he did so with the purpose of ultimately raising it into new life, in the final consummation of his creative purposes.

Although God’s eternal purpose might be central to the Biblical witness this does not mean that it is a purpose that directly causes and desires all that occurs in the bible and, for that matter, all that has occurred within the history of creation. The sin and evil that have consumed creation’s history must not be considered as a desired part of God’s creative intentions - they are nothing less than a real enemy and menace to God and his purposes. The wrongful ways of this world are not *the* way that God has ultimately intended for his creation, but a short-term way that is brought to an end in death. This does not suggest, however, that this short-term way is not filled with purpose. Creation’s present existence provides the context from which creation is given its true direction through being raised into its new life through the reconciling presence of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit in obedience to the Father. Through this once and for all triumph over sin and evil, God delivers his creation from bondage to unrighteousness and in so doing achieves the ultimate consummation of his creative purposes.

---

<sup>321</sup> Barth, *CD III.1*, 1958, p94.

## Bibliography

- Adams, Marilyn McCord, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1999.
- Augustine, *Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus*, [www.newadvent.org/fathers/1405.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1405.htm), (Accessed 25/02/2008).
- Augustine, *City of God*, [www.newadvent.org/fathers/1201.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1201.htm), (Accessed 25/02/2008).
- Augustine, *Confessions*, [www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/confessions.x.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/confessions.x.html), (Accessed 25/02/ 2008).
- Augustine, *Enchiridion*, [www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/augenchiridion/enchiridion01-23.html](http://www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/augenchiridion/enchiridion01-23.html), (Accessed 25/02/2008).
- Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good*, [www.newadvent.org/fathers/1407.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1407.htm), (Accessed 25/02/2008).
- Barth, Karl, *Christ and Adam*, Tom Smail (trans.) Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1956.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics – The Doctrine of the Word of God I:2*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1960.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of the Word of God II:1*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.), T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1957.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of the Word of God II:2*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.), T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1957.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of Creation III:1*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.), T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1958.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of Creation III:2*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.) T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1960.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of Creation III:3*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.) T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1960.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of Creation III:4*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.) T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1961.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of Reconciliation IV:1*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.), T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1956.

- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of Reconciliation IV:2*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.) T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1956.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of Reconciliation IV:3 (first half)*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.) T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1961.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics - The Doctrine of Reconciliation IV:3 (second half)*, Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), Harold Knight (trans.) T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1962.
- Canlis, Julie, *The Ascent of Humanity in Calvin: Anthropology, Ascension and Participation*, Unpublished PhD thesis. University of St Andrews, 2006.
- Craig, Edward (general editor), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Routledge, New York, 1998.
- Cullmann, Oscar, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead – The Witness of the New Testament*, The Epworth Press, London, 1958.
- Diller, Kevin, 'Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good World? - Questions for Alvin Plantinga's Felix Culpa Theodicy', *Faith and Philosophy* 25 no. 1, 2008.
- Heintz, John, 'Wolterstorff and Bradley on Ontology', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1973.
- Hick, John, *Evil and the Love of God*, Collins, Glasgow, 1977.
- Holy Bible – New International Version*, Zondervan, New International Bible Society, 1984.
- Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, [www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103.htm), (accessed 3/3/2008).
- Mackie, J.L., *The Miracle of Theism – Arguments for and Against the Existence of God*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982.
- McDowell, John C. "Nothing Will Come of Nothing": Karl Barth on Das Nichtige, [www.geocities.com/johnnymcdowell/Barth\\_Evil.htm](http://www.geocities.com/johnnymcdowell/Barth_Evil.htm), (Accessed 22/2/2008).
- Moltmann, Jürgen, *God in Creation*, SCM Press Ltd, Munich, 1985.
- Plantinga, Alvin, 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', *Faith and Philosophy* 1, 1984.
- Plantinga, Alvin, *God, Freedom and Evil*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1975.
- Plantinga, Alvin, *God and Other Minds – A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*, Cornell University Press, London, 1967.
- Plantinga, Alvin, *The Nature of Necessity*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974.

- Rodin, R. Scott, *Evil and Theodicy in the theodicy of Karl Barth*, Peter Lang, New York, 1997.
- Van Inwagen, Peter, *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2004.
- Webster, John, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1998.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas, 'Barth on Evil', *Faith and Philosophy* 13, 1996.
- Wright, N.T., *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, SPCK, London, 2003.