

Article

# Evolution, Evil, Co-Creation and the Value of the World

Robin Attfield 

School of English, Communication and Philosophy, Cardiff University, Cardiff CF10 3XB, UK;  
attfieldr@cardiff.ac.uk

**Abstract:** This article builds on and supplements an earlier one in this journal about theodicy. It focuses on species extinctions and on the possible role of humanity as fallible co-creators. Christopher Southgate has suggested that co-creators might shoulder the task of curtailing extinctions. In appraising this view, I distinguish between extinctions resulting from evolution, which humans have limited power to reverse, but which are held to be indispensable for the evolution of complexity, consciousness and self-consciousness, and those caused by humanity itself, which humans should reduce, even if they cannot be halted. Human creativity, however, extends further to the development of skills, trades, the arts and literature. Church Fathers, such as Ambrose, Theodoret and Cosmas Indicopleustes, held that God left the creation incomplete so that humanity could enhance it; certainly, human creativity has introduced agriculture, navigation, technology and culture, adding to the value of the world. Granted belief in creation, this can be understood as co-creation. Granted the value that humanity continues to add to the world, the belief that such creativity flows from the creator's overall plan emerges as a coherent one.

**Keywords:** co-creation; evolution; extinctions; creativity; the value of the world

## 1. Introduction

In a previous article published in this journal, I replied to James Sterba's claim that the existence of a good creator is incompatible with the world's evils. The reply took the form of presenting examples of surprising miraculous counter-instances to the laws of nature that a possible world not governed by natural regularities could harbour (a world of the kind suggested by Sterba that a good God would select), by resorting to and deepening the free will defence to reconcile God's goodness with human-generated evils, and also by supplying a proof of the compatibility of the divine goodness and of the occurrence of evils that an omnipotent creator would have the power to prevent; see my previous article (Attfield 2020). In this article, I want to avoid revisiting these territories, but rather to supplement these arguments by further reflection on some of the evils implicit in the evolutionary process, and the ways in which human creativity can in some cases countermand them, and can generally contribute to the value of the universe, with human beings adopting the role of 'created co-creators' (a phrase discussed below). If God could have provided for the creativity of human beings to enhance the value of the world, then the Universe can readily be seen to be as a benign creator could have wanted it to be, particularly if the evils that it contains can be reconciled with the creator's goodness (as had already been argued in my previous article and will not be argued again here).

The particular evils implicit in the evolutionary process that I have selected for discussion here are species extinctions, which were already numerous prior to the evolution of humanity. The reversal of pre-human extinctions (de-extinction) is largely beyond the powers of contemporary humanity, with a few possible exceptions. Thus, it may be possible by extracting fossil DNA to reconstruct and bring to life again creatures that became extinct in the distant past, and it may be possible to provide conditions (e.g., in game reserves) where species now extinct could evolve again from existing species (Learn 2023). In both cases, there are ethical issues involved, which are comparable in part to the issues that



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arise over the reintroduction of species that had become extinct in one country, but which survive elsewhere. Thus in both kinds of cases, the positive value inherent in the lives and the flourishing of the introduced creatures (and of their descendants), together with the gains in value associated with increases to local biodiversity, need to be weighed against the harms or disvalues that the introduced creatures could bring to other creatures of the same locality (and to their successors).

But this is not the place to enter into the detail of such ethical issues. Importantly, it was already argued in another previous article of mine that natural selection forms a law of nature that, as well as selecting for the species currently alive, fosters the speciation process and produces greater biodiversity and greater value over time than could have emerged on any other basis (Attfield 2000). If so, then as Holmes Rolston has argued, evolutionary (pre-human) extinctions have been indispensable if the overall development of life on our planet from simple to complex and towards increasing consciousness, awareness and self-consciousness was to take place (Rolston 1992, p. 261).

Whether or not the restoration of extinct species is ethically desirable, it has recently been suggested by Christopher Southgate that the prevention of current extinctions may be part of the human role of co-creation. There is certainly no doubt that many extinctions of the past few decades have been attributable, one way or another, to the activities and influence of humanity, and little doubt that the rate of extinctions per year has increased greatly for this reason; see the *Living Planet Report* (Almond et al. 2020).

Readers may be assisted if I step back at this point and explain the nature and scope of Southgate's article. Southgate was contributing to a collection edited by the late R.G. Berry on stewardship, and in his chapter, set about locating stewardship among a 'spectrum' of possible Christian or theistic approaches to the relationship of humanity to the natural world of our planet. His spectrum ranged from what he called 'co-creation' (discussed below), via stewardship and the priesthood of humanity, to what he called 'biocentrism' (Southgate 2006). His understanding of 'biocentrism', however, strays far from what contemporary ethicists mean by that term and seems to include some varieties of deep ecology under this heading, whereas the stance of biocentrism is usually understood to mean the view that all living creatures have moral standing (but not necessarily equal moral standing), unlike ecosystems and species (Dictionary.com 2024). This deviation from the standard definition enables him to direct various charges against biocentrism that appear to miss their ostensible target. However, biocentrism is not my main concern here, and biocentrism is only mentioned at this stage to explain Southgate's spectrum. Much the same also holds good about the priestly role of humanity, which Southgate acknowledges to have no clear substantive content, and thus, to give hardly any guidance, except about the attitude with which human transactions with nature should be undertaken.

So what is meant by 'co-creation'? Co-creation with God is only possible if God is the universal creator; this being so, human beings are themselves creatures, and so, if they share in the work of creation, they are no more than created co-creators, and fallible ones at that. Yet it is possible that God, as creator, left the work of creation incomplete, and wants humanity to embellish or even to complete the created order, or at least to continue the work of creation (Southgate here refers to the work of Philip Hefner (1993), who pioneered and developed this theme, but added some Christological refinements, which play no part in the thesis of the current essay). Human beings would be like the tenants of an unfurnished house, who are given the job of decorating and furnishing it. In the rest of this essay, I discuss the relation of co-creation to issues of theodicy and issues of rectifying some of the evils resulting from evolution and from the anthropogenic degradation of the natural world, while also emphasising the importance of co-creation for the sphere of human culture and value creation. Insofar as the theme of co-creation depends on the original creation being left incomplete, the resulting evils resemble in some respects those remarked by Irenaeus as being due to the cognitive distance purposefully allowed by the creator and subsequently drawn to attention by John Hick (1966); however, these evils far from exhaust even the moral (humanly preventable) evils of our world, for many of

which, as Augustine explained, responsibility must be accepted by humanity, as arising through the exercise (or lack of exercise) of human free will (Attfield 2020). This essay draws on both these theodicies, and also, with respect to physical evils (those not caused by humanity) on the theodicies of Bruce Reichenbach (1982) and of Holmes Rolston (1992), which holds that such evils are implicit in the universal regularities that a benign creator would select, sooner than selecting less beneficent universal regularities, or an irregular Universe instead. This stance about kinds of theodicies can also be found in my previous article in this journal.

## 2. How Co-Creation Was Understood by the Church Fathers

The image of human beings as the tenants of an unfurnished house, charged with furnishing it, is, in fact, a metaphor about the role of humanity widely used by the fathers of the early church. One of the first was St. Ambrose, who wrote the following in a letter to Valentinian Augustus in 394:

Formerly, the earth did not know how to be worked for her fruits. Later when the careful farmer began to rule the fields and to clothe the shapeless soil with vines, she put away her wild dispositions, being softened by domestic cultivation. (Glacken 1967, p. 299)

Thus, as Glacken comments, the world was much more beautiful when it was cultivated than at the beginning of creation. We might have reservations if this model were to be applied to the whole Earth and to the generality of human activity, but it can already be seen how the transformative activities of humanity could be considered to adorn the uncultivated creation (even if not, perhaps, to complete it), and at the same time, to enhance its beauty. As Glacken put matters in an earlier passage, “Ambrose also kept alive <sc. like St. Basil> and passed on the conception of man as a partner of God in improving the earth” (ibid., p. 196). It was indeed with Basil and with Ambrose that humanity first became consciously aware of the co-creative role of human beings, and that the modern theme of human co-creation was first prefigured, albeit with less awareness than is currently possible of the problems to which it has sometimes given rise.

This theme was taken further by Theodoret, Bishop of Cyprus (circa 390–458), who sought in his book *Providence* to win over to Christianity its intellectual critics. In this book, humanity was depicted as

... a triumphant doer and transformer whose hands and arms ... plow up the land, sow it, dig ditches, cut the vine, reap the harvest, bind the sheaves and winnow the grain. The arms have enabled the human spirit to embellish the earth with flowery meadows, rich harvests, spacious woods, and a thousand routes over the sea. Wisdom coming from God enabled man to invent the tools of mining and agriculture, the arts borrowing from one another what is useful to each. The architect borrows the tools that he needs from the blacksmith, the blacksmith gets his shelter from the architect, and both take their nurture from agriculture, but the agriculturalist too needs his horse and his tools. If one gets back to beginnings, one sees how God has granted man the use of things he needs: man has thus become a miner, a builder of cities, a sailor joining the land to the sea. It is part of God's care for the world that man not only lives, but lives well. (Glacken 1967, p. 300)

In Theodore's eyes, each human worker is a limited and dependent being, but with the aid of fellow humans, is able to change the face of the earth, and all this is seen as God's plan, whereby cities and civilisation are constructed, minerals (such as iron) are secured for the tools that are needed, the land is farmed, navigation is initiated and developed, and provision is made for human life not only to be preserved but also for it to thrive and to attain a quality of flourishingness.

However, in some ways, the most striking account of the human contribution to enhancing the world, and perhaps the most explicit account of what amounts to co-creation,

was supplied by the little-known Cosmas Indicopleustes in his book *The Christian Topography*, composed between 535 and 547. In Glacken's account,

He <sc. Cosmas> compared the creation which took place before the appearance of man with the preparation that goes into furnishing and decorating a house before living in it. God has gathered in this house all his manifold and diversified works. When the preparations were complete, God acted like a king who "when he has founded a city and completed it, places there his own image, tinting and embellishing it with various colours . . .". The image God placed in his house is that of man, whom he selected to complete and to adorn it. . . . "the dispensation under which he <sc. humanity> lives <sc. the whole creation> is a school for his own instruction, and for that of all rational beings". (Glacken 1967, pp. 300–1)

Like Basil of Caesarea before him, Cosmas compared the creation to "a school for mankind (sic)" (ibid., p. 301). Human beings are not born already equipped with the knowledge and skills that a co-creator would need but can learn from God's creation how to set about playing their part. Altogether, "There was no incompatibility between the purposes of God and the workings of man, for man was finishing and furnishing the earth with God's help and encouragement" (ibid., p. 301).

Glacken adds that this interpretation of the role of humanity subsequently reappeared in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century and was there represented as a role held prior to the human fall into sin. Thomas thus implied that there is divine approval of man's work, and that this approval is unaffected by the fall (ibid., pp. 301–2). Accordingly, the teaching of this influential figure was effectively that despite human fallibility and proneness to sin, humanity still shares in the work of creation, and that the created order would be less complete without the human contribution.

It was John Passmore who, in *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, brought to wider public attention the ancient tradition of 'Co-operation with Nature', including the theme of co-creation (Passmore 1974, pp. 32–35). Yet, despite his high praise of Glacken's comprehensive work on the relations of humanity and nature from earliest times up to 1800 (Passmore 1974, vii), Passmore strangely omitted Glacken's presentation of the contribution of the Church Fathers from Ambrose to Cosmas Indicopleustes, which is covered in this section. Therefore, it is largely to Glacken, rather than to Passmore, that we are in debt for bringing the tradition of co-creation to light.

### 3. Restoring Lost Species

This brings us back to Southgate's suggestion that "humans' part in the healing of the world could involve reducing, and ultimately eliminating, the phenomenon of extinction, which is such a familiar part of the evolutionary process as we know it" (Southgate 2006, p. 187). As we have already seen above in the Introduction, there are marked limits to the extent that the reversal of pre-human extinctions is now possible, even though some restorations remain compassable. But the rate of extinctions has accelerated in recent decades, and this natural evolutionary process has unintentionally been artificially extended through human systems of agricultural production and through increasing levels of deforestation, whether to expand food production; to mine oil, gas and other minerals; or to build roads to supply these processes and to transport their products.

There is certainly a case for maintaining that those extinctions that took place through natural processes, such as evolution, were not in all cases evils, for some of these extinctions took place because of the emergence of better-adapted species or sub-species, which competed for ecological space with older species, and in some cases, brought about their elimination. This would have been bad in that there could then be no more descendants of their lineage, the presence of which could have ornamented the world. Yet it also made possible the flourishing of new species, which, in turn, made possible the existence and the flourishing of yet others. For example, new species of trees overtopping the previous tree canopy will have made possible the growth of new kinds of orchids in the new canopy, although these changes will sometimes have spelled the demise of earlier canopy dwellers.

Overall, evolutionary history seems to have made possible an increase in the number of extant species, which is a development that is difficult to regard as other than a gain to the world's value, even when the loss of the possible future population of the extinguished species is taken into account (Rolston 2003).

However, the accelerating tally of species extinctions due to human activities of agricultural expansion, mining, deforestation and road building presents a different picture, with species concentrations in particular regions markedly decreasing. One expression of these anthropogenic extinctions has been a massive biodiversity loss, which is a global problem of such a magnitude that it has been compared, with respect to its severity, to climate change (Read 2022). Human awareness of these anthropogenic extinctions probably emerged only when George Perkins Marsh published *Man and Nature* in 1864 (Marsh [1864] 2003) and became well-known only with the growth of the environmental movement from the 1970s onwards.

Against this background, Southgate's suggestion that one constructive role of human agents, including governments and companies, as well as rural populations, could be the gradual halting of the current rates of extinctions of species and sub-species, and of the eliminations of their habitats, becomes readily credible. Such a halting of extinctions has become the theme of significant international conferences, such as the Kunming–Montreal Biodiversity Conference of December 2022, while further progress was made when, in March 2023, a new High Seas Treaty was agreed, with an agreement to preserve the marine life of 30 percent of the oceans (BBC News 2023).

These measures represent a concerted plan to decelerate some of the seriously adverse by-products of human activity. The success of this plan depends on sufficient funding being made available, but the desirability of its aim can hardly be contested, in view of the loss both to humanity and to the other species of the various ecosystems involved in the demise of one or more given species. For example, the loss of honey bees would be a severe blow for human farmers and for the consumers of the plants they grow, while the loss of the (currently endangered) monarch butterflies would involve a great loss of natural beauty, as well as its adverse impact on the species with which these butterflies interact (Attfield 2024).

As for Southgate's suggestion that we ought to halt species extinctions, this could well be beyond the powers of human beings, however well co-ordinated. At best, we could reduce the rate of extinctions to the rate that prevailed before humans evolved, but even that is an achievement probably beyond our reach since the construction of houses, schools and hospitals is likely to continue to be needed unless population growth slows down sooner than the most optimistic predictions suggest. This is because virtually any activity of construction is likely to place at risk species for which the selected construction site was one of the last refuges, while construction close to tropical forests or to coral reefs is likely to imperil the survival of one of the concentrations of species resident there.

There are estimated to be towards nine million species on our planet, of which less than two million have been identified. According to *Science Daily*, the latest estimate of the number of (non-bacterial) species on Earth is 8.7 million, with 6.5 million species on land and 2.2 million in the oceans. This figure was announced by the Census of Marine Life on 24 August 2011. The same study added that 86 percent of all species on land and 91 percent of those in the seas have yet to be discovered, described and catalogued, and that "many species may vanish before we even know of their existence, of their unique niche and function in ecosystems, and of their potential contribution to improved human well-being" (Science Daily 2022). This is all too likely in view of the considerable increase in the rate of species extinctions for which humanity has become responsible.

Regarding the high rates of anthropogenic extinctions of species, the World Wildlife Fund states that the current rate of species extinction is estimated as being between 1000 and 10,000 times higher than natural extinction rates, i.e., the rate of species extinctions "that would occur if we humans were not around" (WWF 2022, p. 3). This being so, Southgate's suggestion that humanity should significantly reduce species extinctions has very considerable scope,

even if his suggestion that we ought to halt species extinctions is not a feasible one. There would also be a large benefit to biodiversity; this is because all the value that might have been found in the flourishing of future species members that might never have lived because their species might have been extinguished before they could come into being, would be enabled to come about, simply because the extinction of their species will have been prevented.

Thus, preserving endangered species can have a high and lasting positive impact, and could be achieved through human collaboration and planning. Those who are appalled at the world's evils and consider them hard to reconcile with the existence of a loving creator should reflect on the difference to the extent of the world's evils that could be brought about by human action. Furthermore, if a benign creator could have created both the various vulnerable species and also the human agents who could make this large difference, then it is less than clear that a world of such extensive evils could not have been created by such a creator, even though the humans thus created sometimes generate many of these extensive evils, instead of reducing them. At the same time, this potential role of human beings fits fairly and squarely into the role of created co-creator.

#### 4. Co-Creation, Culture and Theodicy

Human creativity, however, extends well beyond the prevention of species extinctions and the preservation of endangered species. It extends also to the generation of human habitations; to farming; to navigation; and to art, culture and literature. Some analogous forms of creativity are also shown by members of other species, from termites to beavers and to gorillas, but much the greatest source of creativity is that of humanity.

The vast majority of human beings live in dwellings that humans have constructed. Living in buildings is so much the norm that homelessness has come to be recognised as a plight from which homeless people need to be rescued. While there are a few people living in natural caves, there are others living in cavities made in cliffs or hillsides; even the dwellings of these people reflect the human capacity for ingeniously making habitable places that would have been uninhabitable otherwise. But in any case, these cave dwellers are a small minority; so strong is the desire to make provision for homes that the majority of humanity live in buildings planned and constructed by human architects and builders. Many refugees live in tents, another product of human ingenuity, but this is widely seen as an unsatisfactory arrangement, needing to be replaced with much more adequate housing with as little delay as possible. The construction of streets, houses and pavements is admittedly a loss to many wild species, but it is also predominantly an overall gain to the world, with human needs being satisfied that might otherwise have gone unsatisfied (or satisfied less well).

Much the same holds good for most forms of farming, whether through keeping farm animals in pastures or through the growing of food through agriculture. Some kinds of farming, such as factory farms, cause such distress to the creatures kept within them as to be beyond justification (Singer 1976). Yet, ever since our Neolithic ancestors came to derive their subsistence from farming rather than from hunting and gathering, a larger human population has been supported in this way than could have been on the basis of humans being hunter-gatherers. In other words, farming has made possible a much larger number of worthwhile human lives.

The same could be said of navigation, whether along rivers, beside coasts, or across seas and oceans. Navigation has permitted the exchange of resources and has served to support human life in lands such as parts of Scandinavia and other northern territories, where food is difficult to grow in sufficient quantities. Railways and roads have, of course, supplemented this form of the supply of life's necessities. But it was navigation, together with the farming of fertile regions, such as Ukraine, the Nile valley, the valley of the Indus and Mesopotamia, that facilitated the early development of human cities and the development of human culture within them. Air traffic has significantly increased the supply of goods to places distant from their point of origin, but it was navigation that made possible the founding and development of colonies (such as the Greek colonies planted

round most of the shores of the Mediterranean and Black Seas), and thus, facilitated the spread of culture across hundreds and later thousands of miles. All these technologies have enriched human life, even though they have often blighted it as well, not least when directed to warlike uses. Thus, as even Augustine remarks:

For over and above those arts which are called virtues, . . . has not the genius of man invented and applied countless arts, partly the result of necessity, partly the result of exuberant invention, so that this vigour of mind, which is so active in the discovery not merely of superfluous but even of dangerous and destructive things, betokens an inexhaustible wealth in the nature which can invent, learn or employ such arts? What wonderful—one might say stupefying—advances has human industry made in the arts of weaving and building, of agriculture and navigation! (Augustine, *City of God*, XXII, chapter 24, cited [Glacken 1967](#), p. 299)

Overall, their impact in facilitating the supply of human needs to people who would otherwise have had their needs left unsatisfied suggests that technology too has represented an overall gain to the world. Technology cannot be omitted from any account of human co-creation.

Nor can human art. Architecture, with which is it often coupled, has already been depicted, and was implicit in early buildings, even before it became a profession. But from the days of the crafting of stone, bronze and (later) iron, art has been developed with increasing premeditation and organisation. Thus, the styling of buildings has been supplemented by the working of statues, of statuettes and of vases; meanwhile, other forms of art, from painting to music, came into being through the generation of art forms, the fashioning of tools and implements, and the elaboration of musical instruments. The elaboration of sculpture, painting and mosaics into ever more sophisticated forms brought about high achievements in the ancient world, which have often been developed into yet greater achievements in the modern age.

Meanwhile, despite the loss of ancient music, musical art forms have been developed and perfected from the Middle Ages onwards, with the emergence of madrigals; of concertos; of sonatas; and, from the eighteenth century onwards, of symphonies. In this field (as in many others), each contribution realised new possibilities within an artistic tradition, making it possible for new generations whose training had steeped them in the tradition to produce creative works that would previously have been unimaginable. The creativity of musical composers is one of the prime examples of human creativeness, and, granted also belief in God as creator, of human co-creation.

Literature presents a parallel story, but in this case, a large proportion of works generated in the ancient world have survived, and have led to counterpart works (for example, works of history, of epic and of lyric poetry) being produced, with, for example, the epics of John Milton rivalling those of Virgil. New forms, such as the ode, have been perfected, while the novel has been so developed as readily to outdo its ancient prototypes. Furthermore, many works, both of history and of fiction, have been developed into films, which is one of a range of remarkable new forms of visual art. When Lucretius wrote of the arts reaching a pinnacle of achievement in his own day (first century BCE) ([Lucretius 1922](#), V. 1457), he could not have guessed the creativity that was yet to emerge, partly through the devices of technology being made available to writers, to singers, to instrumentalists and to composers. Furthermore, granted a belief (a belief that Lucretius would have rejected) in a universal creator, all this originality and creativity can be seen to supply yet further examples of co-creation.

This survey of human creativity has, at the same time, formed at least a partial survey of human culture, which also includes the application of original ideas to everyday living, albeit often in derivative versions. Thus, competent craftsmanship involves the application of longstanding arts to new situations and new problems, and includes the work of the plumber, the cobbler and the roofer, as well as that of the architect and the planner. “All trades, their gear and tackle and trim”, as the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins expressed these matters ([Hopkins 1953](#), p. 30), are expressions of human culture that the same poet, for one,

could regard as examples of 'Pied Beauty' that give glory to God, or, in other words, of co-creation, even if those were words foreclosed to Hopkins himself by the strict form of Catholic doctrine adhered to by his own order.

Belief in co-creation certainly harbours plentiful dangers. Human technology has extinguished far too many species, and will continue to do so, unless redirected to preserve the generality of them. There again, it could facilitate adventures in genetics in which not only scourges, such as Huntingdon's chorea, are eliminated, and much suffering prevented, but also in which forms of neurodiversity, such as autism, are put at risk, despite the considerable capacities for creativity shown by many autistic people. Even when biotechnology contrives to produce crops that resist pests, survive droughts and show a potential to avert famines, dangers remain when newly engineered crops are released into the environment and become free to contaminate native species and landraces. These examples already show the need for ethical boundaries to be introduced and observed, constraining the range of potential applications of technological inventiveness (Agius 1998). Many other examples could be cited.

The risks of an overconfident and unconstrained belief in co-creation are thus very great, even before any account is taken of the possibilities of mass destruction through nuclear and biological warfare. Several kinds of ethical limits need to be observed if technology is not to outstrip its proper limits. By way of example, the importance of providing for future generations to have a liveable environment needs to be constantly remembered (Routley and Routley 1978). There, again, the evils liable to be inflicted on nonhuman species make it imperative that anthropocentrism (the belief that none but human beings and their interests matter and should be heeded in decision-making) should be firmly rejected. This rejection also means that concern for future generations extends beyond concern for future *human* generations and encompasses concern for the well-being of future *non-human* species as well. Besides, the need to treat both future interests and non-human interests as ethically significant needs to be emphasised so that these interests are not de-prioritised (or brushed aside) in the struggle for economic growth or for short-term prosperity.

This mention of anthropocentrism warrants a clarification. It might be thought that anthropocentrism is somehow implicit in the theme of co-creation, for the co-creative role of humanity (as well as that of some other species) gives a central role to human creativity. But this focus on human creativity in no way involves anthropocentrism as just defined and is fully compatible with concern for the well-being of non-human living creatures of the present and of the future. Yet, it is anthropocentrism in the sense explained in the previous paragraph that has played a large part in causing ecological problems, species extinctions included. By contrast, human ingenuity and creativity are newly finding ways of limiting and of rectifying some of these problems, as, for example, through the High Seas Treaty of 2023.

Perhaps the nub of the matter is this. If human creativity characteristically follows and observes ethical channels, then the planet and its surroundings will continue to be enhanced, and the outcome will be that the world will become more like what a benign creator might be taken to desire; whereas if human creativity, despite the value that it normally adds, despoils and degrades both human life and other life on the planet, then the outcome will appear far from what a good God might be presumed to favour. Thus, much depends, for the future of the planet and of all its species, on whether humanity becomes more aware of its co-creative role and deploys technology (particularly its newer forms) in a responsible and ethical manner. At the same time, we cannot validly infer either the existence of a benign God, even if the first scenario prevails, nor the non-existence of such a creator, even if the second scenario does. Yet we can still reflect on the metaphysical significance of creativity.

The very fact that so much hangs on the exercise of human creativity itself coheres well with belief in a loving God who seeks human freedom and desires it to be exercised for the good of all living creatures, human and non-human. Human creativity can be seen

to be widely exemplified and to have key impacts, many of which can readily be seen as enhancements of the world as it was before human beings evolved, or, in theistic terms, as expressions of co-creation in practice. The same evolutionary processes that made it possible certainly involve considerable evils, and so does the capacity for choice on the part of creative human beings; the fallibility of humans means that the risk of human creativity being misdirected will be present as long as humanity continues to exist. But the fact that the universe has the requisite kind of natural regularities (or laws of nature, evolution included) to facilitate both this creativity and the emergence of creatures capable of it coheres well with its deriving from a benign creator, and with this creator desiring the creation to be enhanced (and continued, if not completed) by human creativity, the exercise of which can thus be seen as co-creation.

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