Freedom, Sin, and Evil: Lutheran Meditations

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Lutheran and Catholic views of freedom stem from Augustine’s teaching. Both churches subscribe to the anti-Pelagian views of the church father, but they interpret these views somewhat differently. The standard Catholic teaching holds that all sins are due to the consent of the person. This means that the harmful desire, concupiscence, is not yet in itself sin. Only when the person willingly consents to this desire, he or she becomes a sinner. Lutherans, however, traditionally teach that the presence of harmful desire already qualifies the person as sinner. This means that Christians remain sinners. A Christian is “righteous and sinner at the same time” (*simul iustus et peccator*).*¹

This Lutheran doctrine is ecumenically problematic. Modern branches of Protestantism, such as Methodists and Pentecostals, tend to emphasize sanctification and do not find the view of remaining sinfulness very helpful. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, wants to preserve the view of human freedom present in the idea of consent. The Lutheran doctrine of “righteous and sinner” does not seem to pay attention to human responsibility in avoiding sinfulness. Some progress has, however, been reached in ecumenical negotiations. In their *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, Catholics and Lutherans declare that this issue should no longer be regarded as church-dividing. The churches hold together that Christians are “not exempt from a life-long struggle against the contradiction to God within the selfish desires of the old Adam”.*²* But this statement does not yet settle the questions of freedom and sin in detail. In order to clarify the issues, the German *Ökumenischer Arbeitskreis* published an in-depth analysis of the doctrine of Christian sinfulness.*³*

Some of the most surprising claims of this analysis are made by Wolf-Dieter Hauschild. His study, “The Formula ‘Righteous and Sinner at the Same Time’ as Element of the Doctrine of Justification – a Discovery of the Twentieth Century”*⁴* investigates the use of this formula from the Reformation to the present day. Hauschild comes to the surprising conclusion that the formula did not play any role before the year 1903. In that year the Catholic scholar Heinrich Denifle published his polemical bibliography of young Luther, in which he accused the young monk of sexual sins. Denifle considered Luther's view of justification to be an excuse and legitimation of those sins. A person can remain in sin, although he is justified.

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¹ For the history and theology of this doctrine, see Schneider, Theodor & Wenz, Gunther (ed.), *Gerecht und Sünder zugleich? Ökumenische Klärungen*, Freiburg: Herder 2001.
³ Schneider & Wenz 2001. For the critics’ view, see pp. 23-24.
Understandably, the Protestant scholars set out to refute Denifle's interpretation. In their defense they developed a new view of young Luther who struggles with his introspective, guilty conscience. The formula *simul iustus et peccator* which could be found in Luther's newly edited monastic texts provided a theological background structure for the Protestant scholars. Their anti-Denifle portrayal of sin-conscious Luther, reminiscent of Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer, contributed to the new identity of Lutheranism.

Hauschild does not, however, pay much attention to the immediate historical impact of the Reformation. He neglects the basic fact that influential figures like Calvin took over Luther's view of remaining sin and made it a standard Protestant view. In spite of this flaw Hauschild's thesis – that *simul iustus et peccator* is a discovery of the twentieth century – remains a productive error which manages to shed light on some puzzles of modern theology and its understanding of freedom and sin.

In the following I will use the historical thesis as a springboard towards contemporary problems regarding human freedom under the condition of being under sin or bondage. First, I show in which sense Hauschild is right. Second, I also argue that he is wrong insofar as the Reformation period with its immediate historical impact is concerned. Third, I will apply the Reformation discussions to some modern issues, namely, the Darwinist view of human freedom and bondage and the post-Kantian problems of evil. Although the modern world no longer deals with the concept of sin, the problems of natural determinism and natural and unnatural evils continue to haunt people. Does the Lutheran tradition of being righteous and sinner offer any resources in dealing with such modern issues of freedom and bondage? Let it be immediately stated that my reflections are based on family resemblances rather than strict connections. The paper therefore has more the character of meditations than systematic arguments in favor of a given position.

The So-Called Lutheran Paul

Luther studies changed radically in the beginning of the 20th century. The new generation of scholars of the so-called Lutherrenaissance no longer regarded Luther as the father of orthodoxy, but as an individual struggling with his conscience. Karl Holl formulated this turn as follows: “Luther comes to the issues which the great way-opener Paul had foreseen and for which first Sören Kierkegaard in the 19th century, as well as Nietzsche, have shown an understanding.” While Kierkegaard himself did not regard Luther as capable of true existential dialectics, many eminent scholars of the 20th century regarded Luther as a soulmate of Kierkegaard.

Because of this individualist and existential paradigm, the permanent struggle with sin and its consequences received new importance for Luther scholars. The new editions of Luther's early lectures coincided with this interest. As these lectures contain Luther's theology of the cross and witness to his personal development in terms of a permanent struggle between flesh and spirit, they provide a great number of suitable prooftexts for Kierkegaard-minded scholars.

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One important side-effect of this trend was the emergence of the so-called “Lutheran Paul” an exegetical straw man invented by scholars like W. G. Kümmel and Krister Stendahl for the purpose of arguing that historical Pauline theology deviates considerably from the doctrinal premises of Lutheranism as they are spelled out in the tradition of Lutheran Paul. Contrary to the alleged conviction of Lutheran scholars, modern exegetes offered a new perspective in which it was claimed that Paul did not teach the permanent sinfulness of the Christian ego in Romans 7. Moreover, Paul had a robust conscience which did not proceed to introspection in a Kierkegaardian manner, as the Lutherans allegedly believed.8

The basic problem of this exegetical debate was and still is that the “Lutheran Paul” was to a large extent a product of the early 20th-century scholarship which connected Lutheran theology with the existential-Kierkegaardian struggle. I have discussed this exegetical debate elsewhere in more detail.9 The 20th-century individualist paradigm of the “Lutheran Paul” tends to interpret Romans 7 in terms of complete powerlessness. According to this paradigm, the apostle Paul wants to do good but cannot do it; thus he is “weak-willed” in the classical, Aristotelian (Nicomachean Ethics, Book 7) sense of repeatedly acting against his own better judgment. If this were true, *simul iustus et peccator* would mean a permanent failure to do good. This was not, however, Luther’s own view.

Augustine, Luther and Calvin

The theological roots of Reformation debates on freedom are found in Augustine's theology, in particular in his diverse statements concerning the relationship between the harmful desires and the state of sinfulness. One can distinguish between different phases in Augustine, depending on how he understands Paul’s conflict in Romans 7.10

The young Augustine reads Romans 7 as a description of the powerlessness of a worldly person without grace. After 411, however, Augustine revises his view and thinks that the speaker of Romans 7 is the Christian apostle. This speaker cannot do good in a perfect and successful manner, because the repugnancy of remaining sin always effects some impurity. But the apostle can nevertheless achieve good in an external manner. In his late debates with Julian Augustine increasingly moves towards claiming that the remaining concupiscence almost compulsively causes some sinfulness in the actions of Christians. Although Augustine never quite moves to teaching the irresistibility of concupiscence, he nevertheless moves towards claiming that the presence of concupiscence is already in itself sin.

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10 I have used Timo Nisula's diss. “Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence” (Helsinki 2010). Elements of this periodization are also found, e.g., in Markschies, Christopher, “Taufe und Concupiscentia bei Augustinus”, in Schneider & Wenz 2001, 92-108.
Already in his *Lecture on Romans* (1515/16) Luther comes to the conclusion that the old Augustine who writes against Julian is the definitive doctrinal authority. With respect to the interpretation of Romans 7 and the issue of Christian sinfulness this means that even exemplary Christians like Paul are to be called sinners, since concupiscence contaminates all their actions. The act of consent is, therefore, not an adequate criterion of a person's sinfulness: the mere presence of concupiscence is sufficient to qualify the person as a sinner.\(^{11}\)

This does not mean, however, that the Christian would be entirely powerless. In Luther’s view, apostle Paul is an example of strong-willed Christian. In spite of the remaining sin, he can do good, although not in a perfect and pure manner. The apostle’s complaint does not, therefore, pertain to his existential powerlessness, but to remaining gap between doing good in an externally satisfactory manner and doing good in a perfect and pure manner. At least since Rudolf Hermann Luther scholars have seen that this is the historical meaning of *simul iustus et peccator*.\(^{12}\) Luther thus takes over the view of late Augustine, as the church father spells it out especially in his late writings against Julian. The difference to the Roman Catholicism is found in the notion of consent: for Luther, the sin remains in the person even when there is no consent to sin.

Given that this is the correct interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator*, Hauschild’s thesis meets serious problems. The Reformation period and later Protestantism received the view expressed in Luther’s phrase, taking it to mean that the remaining concupiscence present in all Christians is sufficient to qualify them as sinners, although many good Christians may be able to follow God’s will relatively well in their external actions. This result already takes away the edge of Denifle’s criticism of Luther: both Lutherans and Catholics can interpret Paul and Augustine as saying that externally good actions are possible. At the same time this view also separates Luther from the existential anguish of Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer as well as from the straw man erected by modern biblical scholars. The justified sinner may have a fairly robust conscience and strong will: he is not perfect, and he is aware that he is therefore sinful, but he may nevertheless trust in God’s promises and lead a moderately good life.

Hauschild focuses on the 19th century and deals with earlier history only in passing. Although Luther’s *Lectures on Romans* were only discovered and edited in Karl Holl’s times, the description of remaining sinfulness outlined above can be found in other widely distributed treatises, for instance in Luther’s writing *Against Latomus*.\(^{13}\) According to this description, the sinfulness of the justified Christian means that the harmful desire of concupiscence continues to color all his or her actions, leaving them imperfect in some sense. Being righteous and sinner means a permanent struggle, but it does not imply a complete failure in this struggle. The fact of struggle is already sufficient to qualify the person as sinner. Therefore, the demarcation line of sinfulness is not drawn according to the capacity of consent or will-power. Even a person who is relatively free or strong-willed in the sense that she can successfully rule over her own actions nevertheless remains a sinner since sin inevitably in some way colors her actions, keeping her in the struggle. This understanding of “righteous and sinner at the same time” was not only discovered but was also widespread during the Reformation period, as we can see, for instance, from John Calvin's *Institutio*.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{13}\) See Saarinen 2008.

Braunschweig 1864, 3, 3, 10-13.
In this Protestant anthropology of sin, the root of the problems does not lie in the harmful desire as such, but it is the “flesh” which remains the seat of sinful passions and desires. The harmful emotions cannot be eradicated or moderated in the Stoic manner, because they exemplify the rule of the flesh in the current life. Augustine's fundamental problem with Pelagius and Julian was his growing conviction that the carnal aspect of humanity cannot be abolished in this life. Luther radicalized this feature in his early denials of human freedom; although Melanchthon and Calvin may have moderated this radical view to an extent, later Protestantism basically followed Luther's view of “righteous and sinner at the same time”. The 20th-century Protestantism gave new and exaggerated interpretations of this view, connecting it with introspective conscience, complete powerlessness and Kierkegaardian existentialism. Hauschild is to be commended for seeing this development. But the Protestant theology of simul iustus et peccator cannot be reduced to its 20th-century outlook.

Given this, we nevertheless need to ask a broader systematic question regarding the issue of “righteous and sinner at the same time”. Does it really matter whether we understand this doctrine to mean (a) that Christians are powerless but not simply evil or (b) that Christians are strong-willed but not simply virtuous? For both (a) and (b) assume a dualistic anthropology in which two opposing principles, spirit and flesh, remain in the state of struggle. The modern world, however, no longer presupposes such over-personal metaphysical principles which determine both the external range and internal quality of a person’s will acts. If this is true, the picture of struggle, be it under the guise of (a) or (b), has lost its validity.

In the following it will be argued that the idea of over-personal forces ruling over a person’s destiny has not disappeared. The biological world-view employs a complex notion of over-personal forces. Moreover, modern deliberations on the problem of evil continue to ask after the status of various natural forces manifesting themselves in illnesses and catastrophes. A person often remains in constant struggle with such forces. In this struggle the modern person asks, among other things, whether these forces are inevitably to be regarded as being morally neutral, as Immanuel Kant and many others claim. While the natural forces are not produced by an intentional will, they nevertheless seem to contribute to our understanding of goodness, freedom and evil. Although our struggle with natural forces is not essentially a struggle between good and evil, it may, therefore, be connected with it. Given this, there may be some applications of Lutheran theology of evil, sin and freedom to the modern issues.

The Biological World-View

In 1859, Darwin published his Origin of Species, a work which has contributed to the modern discussions on human freedom and determinism probably more than any other single book. The 20th-century breakthroughs in molecular biology have led to the so-called evolutionary synthesis in which Darwin's claims regarding populations and natural selection are connected with the workings of the genes and their DNA.  

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The evolutionary synthesis contains many anthropological views which continue to challenge theologians and philosophers. One very basic view which does not require deeper scientific details is the distinction between genotype and phenotype. All individuals are permeated by a material dualism in which two principles are operative.

First, the properties of my body represent the phenotype resulting from the random combinations of my genes during the procreation. My life is dependant on this phenotype in a complex manner. I have not chosen this body, but my responsible actions can influence its development and the utilization of its capacities. The phenotypical body is in this sense my oikos, the temple in which I can reside and with regard to which I may have some, though limited, freedom.

Second, I carry with me the heritage of my genotype, a complex mess of nuclear acids from which an expert can read not only my personal properties, but also an astonishing variety of more and less successful features of my ancestors since Adam and Eve, maybe even since the earlier days of creation. The duality of genotype and phenotype is in many ways startling and fascinating. All individuals carry within themselves the history of much of the human race. Some inherited features stemming from the distant past may suddenly and dramatically become operative and end the life of the phenotype without any possibility of delay or negotiation.

This means that the phenotype, the somatic body, is also in itself deeply dualistic. On the one hand it is the temple of the spirit: education and cultural progress can take place when the human body works properly. On the other hand, the phenotype is also a body of death: since it constantly manifests the underlying genotype, it remains at the mercy of this broader inheritance. Through this genotype all past generations, dead so long ago, continue to contribute to the present success of the ego, the individual here and now.

At the same time it is also true that each genotype is different and unique, since the enormously long, though finite, series of genetic recombinations (in the so-called meiosis) as well as some mutations have made each DNA unique. The gigantic information available in our nuclear acids thus both constitutes our individuality and makes us all children of Adam and Eve. The good works of our ancestors do not, however, help us since their achieved properties cannot be genetically transmitted. Their virtues remain in their proteines which do not have a feedback to the nuclear acids.

One of the doctrines of Darwinism states that neither the species nor the gene but the individual phenotype is the object of natural selection. In this sense the “nature and destiny of man” always remains the nature and destiny of one individual: every nature is different due to its underlying differences in the nuclear acids, and the destiny of each phenotype is unique, given the unique time and place it occupies in its environment. Since the process of natural selection is directed towards individual phenotypes and presupposes a constant production of differences, Darwinism is a highly individualistic world view. At the same time each individual is deeply dependant on the past generations, since they have constituted the genotype on which the properties of this individual depend.

When Paul, Augustine and Luther describe the human existence as an existence between the flesh and the spirit, these two terms refer to the larger over-personal spheres in which the individual here and now participates. The individual, that is, the bodily phenotype or the somatic ego, is something distinct from both of these spheres. Although the body remains deeply dependant on the flesh, an individual body only represents a particular phenotype of the larger anthropic nature. The flesh thus operates like a genotype, a pool of anthropic nature from which the bodily individual becomes differentiated. Reading Romans 7 and 8 from this perspective can lead to meditations which resemble Luther’s view of simul iustus et peccator.
the view of such bondage under larger powers which does not rule out individual particularity, responsibility and freedom. Let me emphasize that the following meditation is strictly systematic, not historical.

Romans 7-8 and Naturalism

In Romans 7:17-18 Paul argues that the lack of goodness in his action is not due to his ego, but to the sinful flesh still dwelling in him. He thus experiences a dualism in which a deeper, over-personal power has a hold over Paul's actions. The ego may denote either the past or the present Paul (or the typological person discussed); the verses describe, in terms of a posteriori reflection, the curious experience that the actions of this ego were to a large extent determined by another, over-personal power (sin, flesh) that dwells within the ego (alla hé oikousa en enoi, 7:17). This experience of something bigger influencing the decisions of the somatic ego offers a certain parallel to the modern postulate of genotype.

The expression of Romans 7:18: “For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh” is nevertheless prima facie different from the evolutionary anthropology, as the genotype is not merely the source of defects, but also of all useful capacities. In 7:18, the somatic oikos is the ego, the phenotypic person who experiences that there are other inhabitants within it, and that they are not good. A Darwinist might now remark that the genotype contains a resource of the past which has survived through the millennia of natural selection. How can it be that it contains nothing “good”?

To respond to this remark, a slightly different systematic angle is needed. The so-called “naturalistic fallacy” formulated by G. E. Moore states that we cannot infer the nature of “goodness” from the natural properties of usefulness, economy or some other beneficial property available for us. If natural selection in the long run favors some genotypic variants (exemplified by certain individual phenotypes) because of their circumstantial adaptive abilities, we cannot infer that they would be “good” in the fundamental sense of agathon. The favored variants are not selected because of their inherent goodness but because of the adaptive capacity related to their accidental environment. In this – very systematic and ahistorical – sense there is “nothing good ... in my flesh”. This flesh, the genotypic nature, is a result of long natural selection, but the selection has not made it good. Evolution does not guarantee perfection or even progress; it only brings about a capacity to stay above the threshold of survival.

As Romans 8:6 famously points out, both flesh and spirit have their relative or particular reasons (phronêma). The phronêma of the flesh is related to death and remains hostile to God (8:5-8) because it focuses on the natural course of things. A naturalist must presuppose the death of all organisms and leave God out of his methodological phronêma. Let it be added that Paul's view of naturalism may be too negative in his “flesh discourse” – some other New Testament passages could balance this – but this is mainly because he wants to highlight the nature of sinful bondage as something which is both personal and collective-overpersonal at the same time. Although an individual may have a good phenotype and a strong will, being therefore successful in some undertakings, the over-personal rule of the flesh continues and makes the person sinful in this sense.

In this very peculiar manner there is an argumentative parallelism between Luther’s view of permanent bondage under sin and the 20th-century evolutionary synthesis. The 20th century invented a new anthropological dualism, that of phenotype and genotype. Also the Darwinian dualism has its existential side: even healthy people can today become anxious of their possible genetic disorders which may darken their life or the life of their children. In genetic analysis they also need to deal with their parents and ancestors in new, unprecedented ways.

What is the role of freedom in view of such issues? The propagation of complete powerlessness will not help: we need to fight all diseases, and we must also take care of others who do not have resources to fight them. At the same time, it would be illusory to claim that we could repair the genetic disorders and help the evolution to reach its peak. There is no such peak in evolution, but the struggle continues. A strong will and a certain realism are thus needed. There is, consequently, a certain parallelism to the strong-willed behavior of the apostle Paul in Romans 7-8.

The Experience of Malum

Is there a connection between the natural, biological powers which produce health and illness and the deeper philosophical problem of evil? After Kant, the normal answer has been negative. Good and evil are produced by the intentional acts of willing agents; natural forces do not, therefore, relate to the problems of good and evil.

Ingolf Dalferth has, however, recently argued that evil should not be identified in terms of the agent's intention but in terms of the experience of the patient or recipient. Suffering and illness are for Dalferth examples of evils which lie beyond all evil intention but are nevertheless experienced as evils. In some sense the naturalistic fallacy works in one direction only: there is no natural goodness, but there may well be natural evil. We have seen that the elaboration of sin and human bondage in Paul, Augustine and Luther described above points towards a view in which evil is natural and resides in the over-personal constitution of the flesh, whereas goodness is non-natural and can only be given with the spirit.

Dalferth argues that this Kantian definition of evil in terms of intentional will is much too narrow and much too simple. For him, the most adequate criterion of evil is the experience of the patient, the victim or the person who suffers. If it is the case that the victims of accidents, or cancer patients, or other suffering persons experience that something bad or evil has happened to them, although there is nobody to blame, then the suffering in question is related to evil and raises the problems related to evil.

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Both the strength and the weakness of Dalferth's position are obvious. Its strength lies in its realism. When people are facing a serious accident, a fatal illness or a death of their loved one, they feel and experience that something bad has happened to them. Accidents and deaths seldom produce moral elevation. They rather draw people to vicious circles of hopelessness, deprivation and social problems. Although these events do not include evil intentions or wicked persons, they are connected with some inherent *malum*, badness or evil that results from them. It is therefore honest and realistic to say that they are not merely natural processes (which they of course also are, and this should be said), but they involve an experience of evil.

The weakness of this position is that it substantiates the evil in a way which runs contrary to our modern thinking habits. It seems strange to say that, in addition to some evil human intention, there exists evil which encounters us in accidents and illnesses. This sounds dualistic and it may lead to a postulate of the existence of personal evil forces. The following meditation does not want to proceed to that direction, but it argues that the discussion on natural evil resembles the historical problem of remaining sin. There is some *malum* which affects the existence of all people, however strong-willed and good-willed they may be.

Dalferth does not want to claim that all suffering is evil or that suffering and evil are synonymous. Both phenomena are extremely complex and, in addition, our experience of them is complex and individually different. Dalferth underlines the non-dualistic point that evil remains secondary and parasitic to positive creation: illness requires body, accidents presuppose the normal course of things, and so on. What he wants is, however, to take seriously the experience of the one who suffers: this experience of *malum* cannot be taken away by simply saying that nobody intends, or has intended, to harm you.

Coping with Suffering

If this analysis is right, we should ask: how can we cope with the suffering and *malum* that surrounds us even in the relative protection of welfare society? The first option is (1) the project of rationalizing evil by means of writing an intellectual theodicy. My interest here does not, however, proceed to that direction. I am primarily interested in the concrete wrestling of a relatively free and strong-willed person with the powers of sin and evil, including the evil produced by natural forces. I admit that the procedure of writing intellectual theodicy may also serve as a behavioral strategy in this wrestling, but my primary attention is devoted to other strategies.

(2) The catastrophies of nature are often met in terms of progressive optimism, an attitude which aims at upholding the Kantian view of real evil as being always intentional. According to this view, natural adversities are connected with our ignorance and lack of political good will. When we educate ourselves and next generations, we can overcome all adversities and make the world progressively a better place. Progressive idealism may the most viable political and social strategy of coping with suffering. Education and welfare may not provide the last answers to the problem of suffering, but they may be the adequate political tools at our disposal. In this sense the Enlightenment project of progressive optimism continues to be a successful way to counteract the adversities produced by natural forces. It makes ample use of the available resources of will-power and freedom.

There seems to be, however, a limit beyond which this strategy is no longer helpful. Extreme forms of progressive optimism lead to something like omnipotence delusion. In such extreme form people assume that some intentional agent is behind all problems and adversities and can be held responsible for them. Through naming the responsible persons the society can take care of all kinds of badness. The strategy thus broadens the Kantian idea of evil will
lurking behind all kinds of *malum*. Thus one can say that the Foreign Ministry of Finland was responsible for various failures related to the Tsunami catastrophe, or that the American gun laws were responsible for the rampant shooting in the campus. If all guns were prohibited, no shooting could occur. Or, if everybody carried a gun, rampat shooters would be effectively silenced by other gunmen and gunwomen.

The delusion of omnipotence is, of course, a philosophically naive position. It is encouraged by the mass media which wants to personify the responsibilities of all kinds of occurrences that remain beyond human control. According to this line of thought, all adversities, even illnesses and natural catastrophes, are results of human failure and could be controlled by heroic responsibility. If we lived healthily, illnesses could be prevented. If we would take good care of the mother Earth, no natural catastrophes would occur, especially if we could also construct effective warning systems. We often courageously think that we can carry the responsibility of everything in our lives, and in the lives of others. But we are not as omnipotent as we would like to be and progressive optimism does not always work. For this reason, we also need other strategies of coping with pervasive suffering.

(3) A very traditional behavioral strategy of coping with suffering is the act of complaining to God. Amidst of suffering, religious persons (sometimes even less religious persons) doubt God’s goodness and omnipotence, complaining: where were you? Why did you let this happen? Philosophically speaking, such complaints to a divine *ombudsman* may sound primitive and strange. If there is a God, God would most likely not be there to satisfy our wishes regarding the course of life. This strategy has, however, been meaningfully and even successfully employed by Christians in various times. The Lutheran bishop of Helsinki, Eero Huovinen, has on two occasions presented such a lament in Finnish mass media. The first time was after the Estonia boat catastrophe, the second time after the tsunami catastrophe. When asked by the journalists to give a religious or theological explanation, Huovinen meditated on the absence and sleep of God and presented critical questions towards God.18

Some devout Finnish Christians were irritated and claimed in the public that the bishop should be the advocate of God and not criticize God’s purposes. But others were consolated to hear that the bishop sided with other puzzled individuals who lamented and complained. Thus the public complaint became a part of national sorrow enactment, *Trauerarbeit*, and served for a therapeutic purpose. It is not the task of human being to explain the suffering, but to complain in solidarity with other suffering people. It is therapeutically important that there is an address of this complaint, an *ombudsman* who receives the complaint of suffering consumers. It would have been ridiculous from the bishop to utter quasi-scientist or quasi-philosophical sentences, such as: tsunami results from the movement of continental plateaus, or: suffering is the price we pay of human freedom. The attitude of progressive optimism should also, at least for some proper time, yield to the phenomenon of massive sorrow.

(4) Another behavioral strategy is also therapeutic and Christian, but more sophisticated than the strategy of complaining. This strategy has been called nihilodicy or the questioning of evil by Tuomo Mannermaa. In a very personal book he tells how he survived the crisis caused by his wife’s death.19 The burden of suffering and questions of theodicy surrounded the life of the widower. In the depressive moments he very consciously focused his mind on the remaining good objects and meditated their lasting value. This meditation evoked the argument


of nihilodicy, asking why evil and suffering cannot get hold of all things in life, but some objects remain good and beautiful, staying thus outside of the grasp of *malum*.

Focusing on objects and meditating the argument of nihilodicy slowly helped the widower out of the depression. The argument of nihilodicy has some important rational sides, for instance the idea that evil has no autonomous being but it can only corrupt the good objects in a parasitic manner. Another rational side is given in the observation that the good objects, like the garden, four seasons, streams and other scenes of water, animals, children, good art, starlit night and the laws of the universe (such lists are a permanent topos in consolation literature), are lasting whereas adversities come and go in a contingent manner.

Fundamentally, however, the force of object therapy does not reside in rational arguments, but in the mediation from the good objects to the suffering soul. The good objects can communicate some of their goodness to the spectator and thus very slowly heal the soul. At the same time, the argumentative side of questioning evil helps the person to continue to focus his or her mind on the good objects. The object therapy need not be religious; the suffering person may simply meditate the good objects of her garden as alternatives to the chaos. Boethius has forcefully elaborated philosophical object therapy in his *Consolation of Philosophy*, a work which combines our first and fourth way of coping with *malum*.

Suffering and Virtue

It is vitally important to realize that the four strategies outlined above do not manifest complete powerlessness or lack of freedom, but they are accompanied with endurance and strong will in facing the suffering. For the most part, they are no philosophical solutions of the problem of evil, but exemplify the practical opportunities available to a person in a difficult situation. They formulate a particular kind of *simul*, namely, the simultaneity of suffering and virtue. If *simul iustus et peccator* describes the being of a Christian, the simultaneity of suffering and virtue captures the doing of many Christians and other people of good and robust will. It is a doing in which activity stems from passivity and passion. 20

In sum, the problem of evil and the different ways of coping with suffering exemplify the human encounter with over-personal forces. Philosophers may debate whether such forces are a *malum* or simply natural obstacles, but I have been siding with Dalfeth’s claim that they are at least experienced as *malum*. The experience we have is an experience of continuous struggle or wrestling. Encountering such force and struggling with it requires a robust will and a strong personal character.

There is thus a certain parallelism between the will-power needed to struggle with sin and the will-power needed to cope with suffering. The struggles of Paul and Luther thus have their non-identical but sufficiently identifiable counterparts in the struggles of modern human beings. Paradoxically, the bondages of sin, obstacles and *malum* give testimony to our personal freedom: in encountering adversities, more intentional effort is needed than in everyday life in general. In this sense personal freedom not only co-exists with the various bondages which shape our lives; it even emerges from the struggle with them. Such coincidences of suffering and virtue in the realm of doing may even point towards deeper theological simultaneities of being.

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20 For a broader treatment of similar topics, see Stoellger, Philipp, *Passivität aus Passion*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010.
Summary
Risto Saarinen discusses the historical meaning and contemporary significance of the Reformation doctrine of “righteous and sinner at the same time” in its relationship to freedom. He argues that this doctrine does not mean a permanent inability to do good, but rather a lasting struggle in which good actions can only take place with difficulty. Saarinen regards that the exegetical paradigm of “the Lutheran Paul” often exaggerates the lack of freedom in Christian life. After a historical presentation of the views of Paul, Augustine, Luther and Calvin the article looks briefly at the anthropology of modern evolutionary theory. The contemporary distinction between the individual phenotype and the inherited collective pool of genes, the genotype, bears some resemblance to the dualistic anthropologies of the Christian tradition and their understanding of freedom. Saarinen also discusses the various experiences of evil and coping with suffering, arguing that they exemplify a simultaneity of suffering and virtue in which our freedom can be manifested. The picture of struggle between different forces connects Pauline and Lutheran anthropology with the natural sciences and the modern problems of evil.