Article

Religion, Animals, and the Problem of Evil: A Decolonial Approach from Relational Ontology

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Abstract: The fact that there is animal suffering in the world seems to challenge the existence of God. This is because although we can find plausible reasons for the existence of human suffering (the pursuit of a greater good), it seems that the suffering of animals in the world is gratuitous and serves no function in terms of the pursuit of a greater good. In this article, however, we challenge the idea that animal suffering poses a problem to the existence of God by using an Afro-communitarian viewpoint. We contend that animal suffering is logically compatible with the existence of God because it can be understood as promoting different forms of social harmony. In particular, animal suffering can be understood as an enabler for being a subject and/or an object of communion.

Keywords: animal suffering; the problem of evil; Afro-communitarianism; African philosophy; animal ethics; relational ontology; African religions

1. Introduction

The apparent fact that countless (non-human) animals suffer gratuitously has caught scholarly attention in recent years. In particular, animal suffering as a specific *problem of evil* has been discussed at length by philosophers and theologians such as Michael Murray, Trent Dougherty, and Richard Swiburne, amongst others (Swinburne 1998; Murray 2008). Various strategies have been proposed and examined in order to resolve the tension between animal suffering and *theism*, the belief in the existence of a theistic God who is at once omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. For if an altogether omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God exists, then presumably God would not allow animals to suffer gratuitously. To resolve this tension, theistic philosophers propose a theodicy according to which animal suffering serves some purpose (i.e., it is not gratuitous). For example, Dougherty draws on John Hick and defends a soul-making theodicy for animal suffering. On the other hand, Murray takes inspiration from Swinburne's cumulation approach, offering a combination of theodicies, according to which animal suffering is necessary for the cosmos to evolve from chaos to order.

In this article, we wish to offer a new approach to the problem of animal suffering grounded in Afro-communitarian philosophy, which we argue is a better explanation for animal suffering than its supernaturalist competitors.[1] We do not compare our view to naturalism, but only to other supernaturalist views. We contend that animal suffering does not necessarily challenge the existence of God. This is because animal suffering can allow the performance of solidarity and identification (joint social harmony) both between animals and between humans and animals. By suffering, animals can be an object and/or a subject of communion, which is not altogether negative. As such, the suffering is not gratuitous, and it is possible to offer a defense. Further, we also argue that there is an ontological priority of evil for good to occur, making it a necessary condition for good. We do not argue that these theories are true but maintain that they are logically possible and provide a better explanation than those defenses and theodicies offered by

other philosophers who endorse supernaturalism.[2] Holding this Afro-communitarian view simply shows that there is *no logical inconsistency* between the existence of God and animal suffering. To clarify, we do not think animal suffering is necessarily morally justified for greater goods. Instead, we contend that to the extent that there are possible coherent explanations for animal suffering, animal suffering does not challenge the existence of God. We also contend that other theodicies and defenses usually rely either on doubtful premises (e.g., that animal suffering does not exist) or imply morally unacceptable ideas.

The arguments advanced here differ from the previous literature in at least four ways. Firstly, contrary to most philosophers who have addressed this view, we do not rely on weak concepts or premises such as the possibility of 'animal choice', the existence of a 'nomic order', or the inexistence of 'animal pain'. Instead, we rely on the Afro-communitarian concept of social harmony. This concept reshapes the problem of evil as one concerning social harmony, a strategy that has not yet been employed by other philosophers. Secondly, our article is the first to analyze and compare Western theism with African views. To date, most enquiries into Western and African views on evil have not been carried out in the comparative manner that this article proposes (Wang and Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2022; Harrison 2020). Indeed, recently, scholars have emphasized the need for further comparative studies on the philosophy of religion in order to offer less ethnocentric perspectives. However, although there is a methodological need, very few scholars have actually implemented such techniques (Hu 2022; Schachter 2022; Gu 2022; Thurston 2022). Thirdly, although some African scholars have addressed the problem of evil, they have not addressed the problem of animal suffering as we do (Bewaji 1998). Our thesis, therefore, further advances the African scholarship on religion by linking it with other areas of African studies and philosophy, such as African ethics. Fourthly, most African approaches to the problem of evil try to solve it by contending that God is morally imperfect and not omnipotent (Kanu 2013; Ibeabuchi 2013). We agree with this, but as we show in our article, we build a theory that is compatible with moral perfection and omnipotence. In other words, although our argument is that God is not perfect and all-powerful, the solution we offer can accommodate views that understand God as being all-powerful and omnipotent. To sum up, our argument provides a fresh perspective on not only the literature on the problem of evil, by providing different reasons for its occurrence, but also animal ethics, by bringing about a new understanding of how animals ought to be treated.

We divided this article into the following six sections. In the first section 'The Problem of Animal Suffering', we explain the philosophical problem of evil and its relation to the problem of animal suffering. In Section 2 'An Afro-Communitarian Ethics and Cosmology', we outline the Afro-communitarian ethics and cosmology that will serve as the basis to our argument. In the third section 'Afro-communitarianism and Animal Suffering', we tease out the implications of the Afro-communitarian cosmology for the question of animal suffering. We argue that animal suffering can be understood as serving the purpose of enhancing forms of communion. The fourth section 'Omnipotence and omnibenevolence' explains why we endorse God's imperfection and limited powers and how, despite this, there is no logical incompatibility with ideas of moral perfection and omnipotence. In other words, our theory accommodates both views about God. The fifth section 'Why Endorse an Afro-Communitarian Perspective?' responds to the objections that contend that our view is either the same or a worse explanation than the existing alternatives. If this were true, it would be a problem for our theory, because the success of a theory is measured by its explanatory power vis-à-vis the alternatives. Nonetheless, we are able to refute this family of objections. In the sixth section 'Gratuitous and Unnecessary Animal Suffering', we address objections that challenge the implications of Afro-communitarianism.

2. The Problem of Animal Suffering

According to traditional theism, God is a maximally perfect being who is necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. If God exists, then He would not only have good will, but also the knowledge and power to outweigh all possible evil with

compensating good. However, in numerous cases, animal suffering seems to be a gratuitous evil that cannot be outweighed or compensated for. Indeed, animals suffer significantly, and nature seems to be full of cases where the suffering of animals is excessive: 'The ways in which creatures in nature die are typically violent: predation, starvation, disease, parasitism, cold. The dying animal in the wild does not understand the vast ocean of misery into which it and billions of other animals are born only to drown' (Sagoff 1984, p. 303).

Thus, what arises is the evidential problem of animal suffering: the evidence that countless animals suffer gratuitously, rendering God's non-existence more probable than His existence. Maybe such evidence fails to prove that God does not exist. But for all we know, it is more probable than not that there is no God. Still more problematically, animal suffering resists standard solutions to the problem of evil. These solutions typically focus on evils that are either caused by or inflicted upon human beings and then seek to explain why these evils can be counterbalanced, that is, in terms of certain features which are usually associated with humans, such as freewill and the formation of moral character. However, since nearly all animals lack these features, it is not hard to see why those standard solutions fail to work in the case of animal suffering. For instance, it is quite unlikely that a freewill theodicy can redeem the torment suffered by animals that have existed long before free creatures.

3. An Afro-Communitarian Ethics and Cosmology

Afro-communitarianism is a broad category which includes a number of different perspectives (Oelofsen 2015). Nonetheless, these views are united by two key ideas. They all praise harmony as a core value, although they may disagree slightly on what harmony means, and they all share a relational ethics and ontology. There are disagreements amongst Afro-communitarians, and it is important not to generalize and essentialize African views; after all, this is what colonizers routinely did. Nonetheless, some generalizations are possible and desirable. It would be impossible to engage with any theory without some generalizations being made. As the Princeton Professor of African Studies, Peter J. Paris, contends:

> 'Undoubtedly, many will argue that the immense diversity of cultures there prohibits any generalizations whatsoever about Africa. Yet in my judgement respect for the rich diversity of African cultures need not lead to such a conclusion. Rather, as certain generalizations can be made about Americans or Europeans without implying widespread uniformity among them all, similar generalizations can be made about African religions and moral understandings without violating either the integrity or the particularity of tribal groups.' (Paris 1995, p. 27)

Taking this on board, we wish to identify broad structural components of Afro-communitarian ethics and cosmology. To avoid generalizations, we will focus mostly on two schools of Afro-communitarian thought: that of some philosophers from the Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP) and Tutuism. The CSP originates from Nigeria, but not only is it followed by several philosophers from Southern Africa (e.g., Joyline Gwara and Fainos Mangena), but also many Nigerian philosophers have been educated in South Africa and their philosophies are rooted in it (Attoe 2022, 2016). Tutuists are influenced by the thought of Desmond Tutu and are predominantly located in South Africa (Chasi 2018; Metz 2007; Ewuoso and Hall 2019; Molefe 2020). Hence, the two schools comprise the same intellectual circle, and we wish to point out some of the points they have in common. As a result of colonialism, African philosophy in its written form only grew significantly with the liberation of African countries in the 1960s. Resultantly, the first intellectual texts written by Africans—such as Tutu—had a tremendous influence across several parts of the continent, making them relevant for any study into Afro-communitarianism.

The Afro-communitarian perspective of these schools sees all reality as interconnected, either because everything is in 'conversation' or because everything is in continuum with all other things (Attoe 2022; Agada 2019; Kanu 2013). All entities have a relational dimension to the extent that they are part of the same larger entity (Agada 2019; Chimakonam

and Agada 2020). Properties tend to be the result of a relationship, rather than being intrinsic aspects of entities. Innocent Asouzu, for example, contends that all reality is complementary in terms of its parts, with each part or entity *self-insufficient*. What Asouzu means by this is that there is a necessary connection between all entities that exist, and without such a connection things cannot exist; that is, entities need each other to exist (Asouzu 2005). The South African philosopher Motsamai Molefe has used the Akan symbol "*funtunfunefu-denkyemfunefu*" to illustrate this notion (Molefe 2018, 2020). This symbol represents a Siamese crocodile with two heads and a shared stomach (Gyekye 2011). The core idea represented here is that although both entities have a partial individuality, more fundamentally, their identity is connected by a shared stomach. In other words, individuals' identities are shaped and impacted significantly by others, and therefore all human identity is relational. Thus, what one head of the crocodile eats will inevitably affect the other head, and these heads will always be dependent on each other (Gyekye 2011). The point about relatedness can be further underlined by the Shona concept of *Ukama*.[3] This Shona term, which means relatedness, tends to refer to how the environment, non-human animals, and humans are in constant relation with each other and how one's actions impact on the wellbeing of others (Grange 2012). There is, according to the *Ukama* view, a shared identity between everything in existence, which means that everything is inextricably connected on a continuum.

In fact, this idea of communal wellbeing is also present in Afro-communitarian thought (Metz 2007). Inspired by liberation theology and the idea of *Ubuntu*, Tutu, who led the negotiations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, insisted on the forgiveness of Apartheid criminals precisely because the wellbeing of the victims could only be achieved through a harmonious relationship between victim and aggressor. In part, this idea comes from the ideology of liberation theology, which states that forgiveness is a necessary step in liberating us from the sufferings of the world (Tutu and Allen 2011; Allen 2012). Most fundamentally, however, the idea makes sense ontologically because of the underlying notion of the collective consciousness, wherein different parts need to heal each other to heal themselves and achieve a harmonious state of affairs. As Tutu contends:

> 'Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the summum bonum—the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good.' (Tutu 2000, p. 35)

The interpretation of the meaning of harmony is a contested issue. Routinely, harmony is understood as the combination of solidarity/goodwill and identification (Tutu 2000; Metz 2007; Ewuoso and Hall 2019). But scholars such as Jonathan Chimakonam contend that these terms are not distinct. Nonetheless, this interpretation is less common and, as we can see below, there is indeed an analytical distinction between the concepts. Solidarity/goodwill means to act and feel in ways that promote the goodness of the other. Identification means to act, perceive, and feel in ways whereby others are not seen as an independent entity but rather as a continuation of ourselves (Metz 2007). Harmony is essentially a moral concept, but it is not dissociated from ontology (Gade 2012). For the Afro-communitarian, the world is fundamentally a moral world in the sense that the ontological aspects are inextricably connected to the moral aspets (Kanu 2013; Morgan and Okyere-Manu 2020). Entities are partly moral objects, i.e., a tree, a stone, etc.

Nonetheless, from an Afro-communitarian viewpoint, there are rankings within these entities in the world, and this ranking is also measured according to morality. Those entities who can relate to others as subjects and objects of communion have a higher moral status, and the more they can relate to others as subjects and objects, the higher the moral status they have (Metz 2012; Metz and Molefe 2020). To be a subject or an object of communion means to be capable of being a subject of harmonious relationships (or friendship). Some entities can be both the subject and object of communion, while others can *only* be an object of communion (Metz 2012; Metz and Molefe 2020). A standard human being can

usually act both according to solidarity and identification and receive acts of solidarity and identification. A snake, however, can only be an object of communion, for it cannot perform acts of solidarity and identification. For secular Afro-communitarians, things like stones can be neither objects nor subjects of communion. But from an Afro-communitarian religious viewpoint, things like stones do have a spirit, and to this extent they can at least be objects of communion (Mbiti 2015). Routinely, the ranking of entities in the world is: God, other supernatural beings, humans, non-human animals, and other objects in the world (Mbiti 2015). The capacity for communion is learned with experience and through time. It is necessary for beings to engage in communal acts as a habit for them to gain the capacity to commune. Virtue is learned through both repetition and habit (Menkiti 2018; Gyekye 2011).

There is a conception of God that underlies this view. Some Afro-communitarianism scholars hold a panentheistic view that although God is not the same as nature, He is present in every aspect of nature. God is a conscious force that gives vitality to everything that exists and, thereby, He is what gives life to everything. This God is self-creator and the creator of everything that exists (Agada 2019). God is also routinely understood to be morally imperfect and not omnipotent, though He is morally better and more powerful than any other entity. God has learned to be morally better than others, but He can still make mistakes and may occasionally have vices. He is in the process of learning and becoming, just like human beings, but at a higher and more advanced level (Chimakonam 2022; Ogbonnaya 2022). Also, God usually needs the help of ancestors and semi-deities to achieve His goals, making Him not omnipotent (Hu 2022). Note that this notion of God as imperfect is less common in Tutuist circles, which have been highly influenced by Christianity. Tutu, Metz, and Molefe do not hold the view that God is imperfect or not omnipotent (Tutu 2011; Metz and Molefe 2020). However, the idea of the imperfection of God is widespread in Southern African cultures. For example, the Zulu believe that God is highly dependent on ancestors in many ways (Berglund 1989). Conversely, in the intellectual circle of CSP, there is a tendency to understand God as imperfect but with exceptions (Ada Agada perceives his view as a limited God view, but it seems his perspective is closer to the Theistic God) (Agada 2022).

Note, however, that the Afro-communitarian view, albeit salient in Africa, is not unanimously considered a plausible view by all Africans. Indeed, several African philosophers have contested Afro-communitarianism. Philosophers such as Táíwò, Oyowe, and Matolino have contended that Afro-communitarianism is not only unrepresentative of African views but also an ethically dubious perspective, because it oversubsumes the individual into the community in a way whereby the individual disappears (Taiwo 1985; Oyowe 2014; Matolino 2013). Although we understand that Afro-communitarianism does not represent all Africa, our point is not to reduce Africa to Afro-communitarianism. Instead, we simply state that this is a salient view in the African context and therefore deserves consideration. If the claim of these philosophers is that Afro-communitarianism does not exist in Africa, this would be an odd statement to make, given the ample historical, philosophical, and anthropological evidence pointing in this direction (Gade 2012; Metz and Molefe 2020; Ewuoso and Hall 2019; Thurston 2022; Schachter 2022). The second point is based on a misunderstanding of Afro-communitarianism. What Afro-communitarians state is not that individuals are to be subservient to the community. Instead, the argument is that there should be a balance between communal values and individual rights, and not simply a prioritization of individual rights without looking at cultural difference (Chimakonam and Agada 2020).

4. Afro-Communitarianism and Animal Suffering

Taking this ontological and moral groundwork, the questions that arise are: Why does this suffering occur? Is it gratuitous? There are several reasons why animal suffering can be logically understood to be not gratuitous from an Afro-communitarian viewpoint. Note that the reason why animal suffering is sometimes considered gratuitous is because no

greater good can be achieved through it: animals are usually understood as having no souls to improve, and their suffering does not benefit humans in anyway. From an African perspective, however, to the extent that animals can be an object or subject of communion, they are also moral agents, albeit usually at a less sophisticated level than humans (Metz 2017). From the point of view of moral values in Afro-communitarian philosophy, animals can be the object or subject of communion, i.e., they can perform acts of social harmony or be recipients of such acts (Metz 2017). The key argument is that functions can be found for this animal suffering. We do not contend that the functions are true, but that they are logically possible. The fact that they are logically possible is sufficient to show that many Atheists are mistaken, as the argument from many Atheists is that such reasons are impossible to find.

Some animals can learn virtue to a certain level and become better. Suffering can perform the function of teaching virtue, i.e., important features of our character. This is the case, for example, in elephants, marine mammals, and great apes (Wichert and Nussbaum 2017; Cavalieri and Singer 1994). Likewise, moral behavior and learning can also be found in domesticated animals (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011). For example, when humans educate domesticated animals by restricting their behavior (e.g., controlling the quantity of food), the animal is learning a virtue. Animals can also learn through a reward–punishment technique that controls their physiological needs in certain spaces. By learning in this way, they become more able to commune with others. In fact, both examples point to the fact that virtues allowing animals to live in communion with others can be acquired, and that they are acquired through some forms of suffering. Moreover, when animal suffering occurs, animals also have chances to act in communal ways towards other animals, which is a valuable thing. For example, when an animal is hurt or attacked, it is commendable that other animals protect or save their fellow friend. These examples are instances of solidarity and identification, which constitute the greater good of social harmony in Afro-communitarian thought. Some animals can perform acts of solidarity towards others when they aid them or act in ways which honor communion (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011). They can perform acts of identification to the extent that when they aid other animals they also behave towards and perceive other animals as having morally relevant similarities that are worth aiding. Even if some animals are unable to perform moral actions such as these, they can be the recipients of such moral actions, which is also of great value. In short, when interacting with other animals, they can be both objects and subjects of communion. It does not matter if the form of communion is more rudimentary than that of humans: it is the same as for, say, babies. The point is that communal goods result from these animal–animal interactions.

Animal suffering can also be instrumental for the moral learning of humans if animals are seen as the objects of communion. According to African cosmology, to the extent that suffering is felt by all, humans also suffer when an animal suffers. This, in turn, is helpful in creating empathy. It is often through the experience of others' pain that one can develop empathy towards others (Luo 2017). Through experiencing their pain, one identifies with others; this, in turn, promotes solidary acts towards them. For instance, we are not solidary nor do we identify with a stone because we do not experience a stone's pain when we look at a stone. But when we look at an animal in agonizing pain, we do experience its pain to a degree and are somehow linked to it. To learn animal pain is, therefore, a way to learn how to be kind to animals and take care of their welfare; indeed, it is a necessary condition that allows people to properly understand animals, treating them according to their needs and promoting their welfare, given that sometimes their mental and physical structures are different (Browning 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). Experiencing their suffering may therefore contribute to an understanding through trying to care for animals.

Moreover, note that interactions with animals is where children first learn to be moral. It is often through the repetition of relations with animals, especially companion animals, that we learn moral codes (Cole and Stewart 2016). In fact, research shows that positive relations with animals are likely to bring about positive relations with others. A child who

learns to look at an animal as a friend learns forms of socialization that dispose them to be more inclusive and tolerant towards others (Kymlicka 2018). The possibility of learning kindness to animals (which is only available through the possibility of evil) is provided by an interaction with animals. Animals can be an object of communion, and by being an object of communion, their suffering is not gratuitous. Natural evil, like animal suffering, confers possibilities for the performance of greater good (Swinburne 1998). Fundamentally, at the core of this argument is an understanding that evil is complementary to good. In Tutu's words:

> 'Our ability to do evil is part and parcel of our ability to do good. One is meaningless without the other. Empathy and compassion have no meaning unless they occur in a situation where one could be callous and indifferent to the suffering of others. To have any possibility of moral growth there has to be the possibility of becoming immoral'. (Tutu 2011, p. 13)

This argument is not merely functional. Instead, this is an ontological argument in the sense that it is analytic, a priori, and a necessary premise to the conclusion that good requires evil. It is an ontological necessity that evil occurs for the possibility of good to occur. In other words, it is through the possibility of evil or the occurrence of evil that there is a possibility for good. A person cannot perform a good action when the state of affairs is such that there is no negative situation where the good action can occur. For example, a person might perform a rescue and show courage (a good action), but that person would be unable to perform such an act if there was no one needing to be saved (a negative state of affairs). Good in itself is what Innocent Asouzu calls a self-insufficient entity, i.e., one that cannot exist or be sustained by itself, but needs other entities to exist (Asouzu 2005). All goodness is self-insufficient in the sense that it can only be performed through the occurrence of badness or at least the possibility of it.

According to Afro-communitarian cosmology and the ethic described, these states of affairs are the result of a powerful and morally good but not omnipotent and morally perfect being. Put differently, this world is the best that this morally good (but not perfect) and powerful (but not omnipotent) God can create (Chimakonam 2022). We, humans, can perform good actions but not perfect actions—it is the same for this conception of God. God performs extremely well (and better than any other existing being), but He Himself is limited, and therefore this is the best possible world for His (limited) abilities (i.e., his moral knowledge, virtue, and power). God, however, can improve this state of affairs because He gains more knowledge and virtue with experience and, thereby, is able to build up a better world.

5. Omnipotence and Omnibenevolence

In Section 3, 'Afro-communitarianism and Animal Suffering', we argue that Afro-communitarianism can explain why animal suffering is not gratuitous but rather leads to some good. We also contend that God in the African context is usually not understood as morally perfect and omnipotent. However, this claim might invite the objections that because God, according to Afro-communitarianism, is neither omnipotent nor morally perfect, then we have not actually provided a solution to the problem of evil. We wish to argue that although we contend that God is not omnipotent and omnibenevolent, our theory is not incompatible with these theistic ideas. It can be the case that God is all these and evil still occurs. The objection may have two forms:

Objection 1. God's omnipotence entails that He can bring about good without paying any price for evil. But if Afro-communitarianism is true, the evil of animal suffering is necessary for the good of social harmony. So, either God is not omnipotent, or Afro-communitarianism is false; there is no in-between.

Objection 2. If God is omnibenevolent, then He would not intend to bring about evil in this world. However, Afro-communitarianism asserts that animal suffering is necessary for social harmony. Thus, if God intends to bring about social harmony, then He has to intend

to bring about animal suffering. The upshot is that, given Afro-communitarianism, God is not omnibenevolent.

These objections are clearly related, for just as intention and action go hand in hand in rational human agency, so does God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence. If God intends to bring about a certain state of affairs, then He has the power to bring them about, and vice versa. Thus, the range of what God wills is exactly the same as what He can do. Hence, Objection 2 can ultimately be reduced and answered by replying to Objection 1. For this reason, and for simplicity's sake, we will focus on Objection 1.

There are two ways to resist Objection 1. Firstly, one can ascribe to God only a weak form of omnipotence. Let us say that God is strongly omnipotent if and only if He can bring about all logically possible states of affairs. If a good state of affairs presupposes no evil is logically possible, then a strongly omnipotent God can bring about good without paying the price of evil. But as is well known, the existence of such a strongly omnipotent God is prima facie incompatible with the evidence of gratuitous evil. Given this awkward situation, a theist is well justified to believe in a weakly omnipotent God instead. After all, a weakly omnipotent God is still omnipotent, only weakly so. Such a God, in contrast to the strongly omnipotent one, can only bring about some, but not all, logically possible states of affairs. Specifically, there are some logically possible states of affairs that even an omnipotent God cannot bring about, because He is omnipotent only in a weak sense.

In this light, the proponent of Afro-communitarianism might argue for the following claims:

(1) The logically possible states of affairs that the weakly omnipotent God at issue cannot bring about—States of Affairs 1, in short—are those good states of affairs that presuppose no evil at all.

(2) The logically possible states of affairs that the weakly omnipotent God can bring about—States of Affairs 2, in short—include those good states of affairs that presuppose some kind or amount of evil.

(3) If the range of States of Affairs 1 is not significantly greater than the range of States of Affairs 2, then a weak form of omnipotence should be recognized as genuine omnipotence.

(4) One of the states of affairs as per (2) is social harmony, and the evil it presupposes is animal suffering.

We consider the above proposal to be attractive, but also seriously limited. It is attractive because it provides a defensible response to Objection 1 to Afro-communitarianism. But it is also seriously limited, because it salvages this theory at the price of weakening the power of God. In contrast to this proposal, we think Afro-communitarianism is compatible with a strong form of omnipotence. We therefore agree with Objection 1 that God can bring about all logically possible states of affairs. However—and this is where our theory might stir up controversy—we disagree with Objection 1 over the very idea of good and evil.

In one of the premises of Objection 1, God's omnipotence entails that He can bring about good without paying any price for evil. The truth of this premise is grounded in *incompatibility between good and evil*, or equivalently in the medieval idea that evil is the "privation of good". Good and evil are incompatible in the sense that nothing is both good and evil in the same respect. For example, if killing a baby for fun is evil, period, then it is not good, period. In particular, the claim that God is perfectly good amounts to the assertion that God is without any kind or amount of evil.

Nonetheless—and this is our second reply to this question—we reject the incompatibility between good and evil, because Afro-communitarianism entails its negation. In Afro-communitarianism (see Section 3), all things are interconnected, and all properties are extrinsic ones. This applies also to good and evil. If we substantialize good and evil and treat them as things, then they are interconnected. Regarded instead as properties of things, then they have extrinsic or relational properties. There is nothing absolutely good, nor is there anything evil in itself. For simplicity's sake, let us follow the jargon of Section 3 and say that in Afro-communitarianism, good and evil are *interconnected*. Before we amplify this point, it suffices for our present purpose to note that the axiological implication of

Afro-communitarian ontology entails that good and evil are not incompatible. As is claimed in Section 4, "it is through the possibility of evil . . . that there is a possibility for good", and "our ability to do evil is part and parcel of our ability to do good". Thus, one of the premises of Objection 1 is false, and Objection 1 collapses as a result.

In Afro-communitarianism, good and evil are interconnected. Thus, it is logically *impossible* for the omnipotent God to bring about any good without also bringing about some evil related to it. But note that this has nothing to do with a weak form of omnipotence, because in Afro-communitarianism, the very notion of good is already interconnected with that of evil in the first place. Therefore, a strongly omnipotent God—the God who can bring about all logically possible states of affairs—can bring about a good state of affairs only by paying the price of evil.

To clarify the interconnection between good and evil, we shall focus on two issues. The first issue is how good and evil are interconnected. One might distinguish between physical (spatiotemporal), metaphysical, and semantic/conceptual interconnection. Thunder and lightning are physically interconnected. A person's essence and existence are not metaphysically interconnected. The concept *bachelor* and the concept *unmarried* are semantically interconnected. In accordance with this division, it is possible to distinguish different ways in which good and evil are interconnected. But that is beside the point. As Section 4 suggested, it is only by something evil occurring that we can manage to achieve something good. Thus, our point is that no matter how good and evil are interconnected, they are *necessarily* interconnected without being identical, such that it is logically impossible to separate them, whether in terms of physical reality, metaphysical structure, or concept. For only if good and evil are necessarily interconnected is it logically possible for a (strongly) omnipotent God to bring about social harmony through animal suffering.

The second issue is whether there is any independent reason—a reason unrelated to the problem of animal suffering—to accept the claim that good and evil are interconnected. Since the interconnection between good and evil is derived from Afro-communitarianism, we speculate that most people who identify with African culture would welcome this notion. The instances outlined in Section 4 also support the idea that good and evil are interconnected. But there is a more serious worry. Assuming that good and evil are necessarily interconnected, nothing is good or evil in itself, or equivalently, there is neither absolute good nor absolute evil. One might conclude from this that we are committed to a form of moral nihilism, but this charge is not justified. For we still believe that it makes sense to say something is good (or evil), and that a moral agent should do what is good and avoid what is evil. What we deny is merely that good and evil, in themselves, are not interconnected. In other words, we believe that although it is important *for a moral agent* to do what is good and avoid what is evil, it is still impossible, sub specie aeternitatis, for a good state of affairs to exist unrelated to any evil.

The skeptic may object to the idea that omnipotence is being able to do everything that is *logically* possible, arguing that this is not a strong form of omnipotence at all. Rather, a strong form of omnipotence is, as Rene Descartes suggested, the capacity to do anything that is logically and illogically possible, i.e., omnipotence is a form of unlimited power. Hence, He should be able to create a world where evil is unnecessary for achieving good, even if this is illogical (Descartes 1993). In reply, note that Descartes' perspective on omnipotence is not how the philosophical community tends to use the term. Most philosophers do not understand omnipotence as limitless power (Swinburne 1998; Plantinga 1974; Van Inwagen 2008; Almeida 1964). Indeed, philosophical discussions become meaningless if terms are used in ways which are less familiar to the relevant community. And, as some philosophers have already noted, there are good reasons for not holding this view, as it is self-refuting. If God could do anything that is logical and illogical, it would mean that He could make a stone that He could not lift. But if He could lift a stone that He is unable to lift, then His omnipotence entails His limited power. Thus, omnipotence would be a self-contradictory term.

Now, having contended that it is logically possible that God is omnipotent in the strong sense, is this thesis to be preferred over our thesis that God is supreme, morally good, but

not all-powerful and morally perfect? We do not think it is. As atheist philosophers such as James Sterba and Christian philosophers such as Michael Almeida have pointed out, it is far from intuitive and obvious that the world we live in is the best world that a perfect being could create (Almeida 1964; Sterba 2019). Hence, even if evil and good are *logically* compatible, this *does not make this theory more likely* than the alternative, i.e., that God is good and powerful, but not morally perfect and all-powerful. So, although both views of God are compatible with our argument, and following the Occam's razor principle that requires that the simplest of competing theories be preferred to the more complex, we think that our initial response is more plausible. What our argument establishes, however, is different from what some atheists seem to suggest in at least two ways. Firstly, while some atheists contend that evil is gratuitous and there is no possible explanation for it, we uphold that this is not the case. Contrary to the atheists' view, we think it is possible to find explanations for the occurrence of evil which would not make it gratuitous. Secondly, while atheists suggest that this evil is definite evidence that *disproves* an omnipotent and morally perfect God's existence, we contend that this cannot be proved. We uphold that the existence of evil just makes it *less likely* that such a God exists than an imperfect God.

6. Why Endorse an Afro-Communitarian Perspective?

We wished to develop an *alternative* account of deity that sits more comfortably with it than theism. It is widely agreed that rationality comes about by degree. Therefore, there is no such thing as theism being rational, *period*; rather, the proper thing to say is that theism is more rational than *something else* vis-à-vis animal suffering. Taking this on board, we need to confront our perspective with the alternatives. For a possible objection against our argument is that other alternatives have a stronger explanatory power than ours.

A first family of approaches to the problem of animal suffering is the approach inspired by the thought of Descartes, who famously contended that animals did not suffer because they were machines. Likewise, some contemporary philosophers have developed a Cartesian-like explanation, whereby they contend that animal suffering is either inexistent or morally insignificant. According to this view, animal suffering does not pose any problem to the existence of God. This is because God does not need to be morally concerned with an evil that either does not exist or is not morally relevant (Lewis 2009; Harrison 1989).

However, this perspective can be easily dismissed. The denying of animal suffering is not plausible given that there are many factors suggesting that animals do experience significant pain (Browning 2019a, 2019b). Animals are sentient, and thereby it is not plausible to state that they cannot feel pain or that their pain is not morally significant. Furthermore, the denial of the pain of animals seems a sign of the rationalization of harm, whereby agents try to find reasons to inflict suffering that is not morally justified.

A second family of views is that pain and suffering are necessary conditions for participating in some form of meaningful choice. Joshua Moritz, for example, contends that "animal choices, though perhaps not as self-conscious, free, or morally culpable as those of humans, are still theologically significant insofar as they influence the degree and specific types of evolutionary suffering that are brought into existence through such choices" (Moritz 2014, p. 373). Likewise, Swinburne considers that suffering allows animals to understand the consequences that bring about a certain outcome. In addition, Swinburne upholds that suffering serves the purpose of animals experiencing mental states required for moral actions:

> 'Yet an animal cannot go on looking for a mate despite failure to find it unless the mate is lost and the animal longs for it; nor decoy predators or explore despite risk of loss of life unless there are predators, and unless there is a risk of loss of life ... And there will not be a risk of loss of life unless sometimes life is lost. Nor can an animal intentionally avoid the danger of the forest fire or guide its offspring away from one unless the danger exists objectively. And that cannot be unless some animals get caught in forest fires. For you cannot intentionally avoid

forest fires, or take the trouble to rescue your offspring from forest fires, unless there exists a serious danger of getting caught in fires.' (Swinburne 1998, p. 177)

Also in this family of views is the perspective defended by Dougherty (Dougherty 2014). He proposes a saint-making theodicy for animal suffering in his *The Problem of Animal Pain: A Theodicy for All Creatures Great and Small*. Drawing on Irenaeus and John Hick's soul-making theodicy, he argues for the following theses. First, the best kinds of worlds are inhabited by creatures with saintly virtues. Second, one of the necessary conditions for such creatures is a very significant amount of animal suffering. Third, for there to be a world full of such creatures, God would create a world with the right amount of animal suffering. Last not least, our actual world has just the right amount of animal suffering to produce creatures with saintly virtues. Thus, Dougherty concludes that the reason why God allows animal suffering is that it is necessary for animals to become saintly in the afterlife. Central to Dougherty's proposal is the thesis that non-human animals, like human beings, have souls that can be sanctified in the afterlife. Thus, Dougherty's proposal does not revolve around something that is unique to non-human animals. Rather, as the book title suggests, it appeals to something that human beings and animals have in common, namely a soul.

In reply, we should start by saying that these theories are in the same family as ours; our theory, just like these, attributes the possibility of a moral good to the suffering of animals. Nonetheless, it must be noted that these theories entail a problem that our view does not. Namely, since these answers have mostly developed in the context of human theodicies, they are less convincing, because they rely on a strong view of animals' cognitive and moral capacities. It is quite questionable whether animals make choices in the sense that Mortiz and Swinburne suggest. Their views imply a high level of cognitive and moral capacity for all animals (Gasser 2021). Our view, in contrast, does not require such a level of capacity; instead, our theory realizes that beings have different levels of capacity, and only some degree of capacity for communion is required in some cases. In fact, there are cases that do not require many capacities at all: they only require the capacity to be an object of communion, which simply requires sentience. Hence, our theory can explain the suffering of many more beings.

A similar problem applies to Dougherty's theory. For his theory to be true, animals need to understand the horrors so that they can participate in them. But again, most (and perhaps all) animals are limited in such levels of cognition, i.e., to understand the meaning of such horrors. This is why Christian philosophers such as Mary McCord Adams think that animals cannot be included in such human-driven theodicies: "If all mammals and perhaps most kinds of birds, reptiles, and fish suffer pain, many naturally lack self-consciousness and the sort of transtemporal psychic unity required to participate in horrors" (Adams 2000, p. 28).

A final family of views is the cosmic order perspective. These solutions seek to explain how animal suffering is redeemed in terms of the cosmic order. The basic idea here is that there is something that is intrinsically good and that this depends on non-human creatures. A cosmic order seems to be a perfect candidate for explaining this. Peter van Inwagen (Van Inwagen 2008) proposes a defense of animal suffering in Lecture 7 of his *The Problem of Evil*. As a technical term, *defense* stands for an account on which the coexistence of evil and God is plausible for all we know. Van Inwagen's defense consists of four claims (for clarity's sake, we have reorganized and simplified Van Inwagen's account in Lecture 7). Firstly, God creates the cosmos. Secondly, if the cosmos contains no animal suffering, then it would lack *nomic regularity*, in the sense of going against the law of nature. Thirdly, there is some important good that (i) depends on the existence of animals and (ii) outweighs their suffering. Fourthly, nomic regularity is valuable. The gist of this account is that animal suffering can be plausibly understood as an unavoidable by-product of nomic regularity.

Murray's (Murray 2008) proposal in his *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* critically interacts with Van Inwagen's defense on two counts. First, Murray argues that defense (in Van Inwagen's sense) is not what we usually appeal to

when faced with evidence against beliefs we confidently hold. When I confidently believe P, and encounter evidence E against it, what should I do to "stand my ground", so to speak, supposing this is indeed the right thing to do? On Murray's intuition, I do not have to offer an account in which the conjunction of P and E is more plausible than not for all we know; it suffices that it is implausible to reject P. Thus, all I need is an account in which the conjunction of not-P and E is not plausible *at all*. Indeed, in such an account, the conjunction of P and E is still likely to be implausible. But for Murray, all is fine as long as the conjunction of P and E itself is not ruled out as an epistemic possibility. To distinguish such a weak account from a defense, which is too strong, Murray labels it as a causa dei.

The second point on which Murray diverges from Van Inwagen concerns nomic regularity. He contests that nomic regularity does not satisfactorily explain why the good it aims at cannot be got otherwise, i.e., without pre-human animal suffering. A more successful account in terms of nomic regularity should explain precisely this issue. Thus, Murray seeks to prove that (1) a universe that evolves from (pre-human) chaos to order in a law-like way is intrinsically good, (2) real animal suffering is an unavoidable by-product of such an evolutionary process, and (3) the intrinsic goodness of a universe evolving from chaos to order outweighs the animal suffering it inevitably produces. In the last analysis, Murray shares with Van Inwagen the basic insight that order or regularity is something valuable but that it comes at the price of animal suffering. The proposal based on this insight is applicable to the problem of animal suffering insofar as such order or regularity does not derive from human beings but is instead cosmic.

But the point that nomic regularity is valuable and, particularly, so valuable that it justifies gross suffering seems very counter-intuitive. To hold such a counter-intuitive view, its supporters need to make a stronger statement which leaves no doubt that achieving cosmic order is better than eliminating the suffering of animals. It is, in short, the burden of those who have a very counter-intuitive view to prove their point (Huemer 2006). But to capture the idea that this view is very counter-intuitive, we need to compare the following possible worlds. In world Alpha, there is cosmic order, but this means that all existing sentient beings must endure one hour of excruciating pain every day. In world Gama, there is no cosmic order at all, while all existing sentient beings only occasionally feel some level of pain. It is hard to understand why world Alpha is better than world Gama. This is not only because it is unclear why having cosmic order brings about anything good (if cosmic order is cruel it cannot be good, i.e., cosmic order is not good in itself), but also because even if there is cosmic order, we are unlikely to actually experience it, and we are more likely to feel that we are living in a world corresponding to Gama anyway. Note that although we also offer an ontological argument regarding how the cosmos works, our view differs significantly from this. We do not uphold that the reason why evil exists is because it is good to have an order; instead, our argument is that evil is a necessary condition for good to occur.

7. Gratuitous and Unnecessary Animal Suffering

The first possible objection against the above view is that there are several ways to acquire moral knowledge (like virtue), and it seems unnecessary that one must be exposed to evil in order to acquire this knowledge. In particular, it is possible to imagine a virtual world that simulates evil, where individuals could learn about evil virtually. It is also possible to imagine a world where God could give individuals an innate knowledge of right and wrong. In both cases, evil would be unnecessary for moral knowledge. According to this view, animal suffering is not necessary for moral learning. The second potential objection is that even if evil is necessary for acquiring moral knowledge (like the virtues mentioned above), a world without evil is better than a world with evil. So, God should have created a world where only good exists.

The replies to these first two objections are connected. It is not difficult to see that it is logically possible that moral knowledge could be acquired in different ways. But the two aforementioned possible worlds imagined in the objections do not necessarily produce a

better world than the one we suggested. In particular, a world where individuals would be constantly deceived, as in the virtual option, would not be a better world than the world where we currently live. Take a scenario similar to that produced by Robert Nozick's thought experiment on pleasure. Nozick (2013) Imagine there was a machine whereby you could experience things virtually but never live them. Through this machine one would learn moral knowledge without the experience of evil. That is, we would experience evil only virtually and not in fact. Then the question arises, would we plug ourselves into to this machine? If we think that all that matters is the absence of evil, we would do so, as it would allow us to access a better world. But there are strong reasons why we should not. For one, it is better to actively do certain things rather than just have a virtual experience of them. For instance, most people would say that although an online relationship which does not develop into an offline one might be less dangerous because one is less likely to put oneself at risk (other things being equal), an offline relationship, even with the potential risk, is a better kind of relationship. Most people would not choose the online option just to eliminate the possibility of the risks inherent in an offline relationship. This is so because it is more valuable to experience something than to have a fake experience of something. In other words, the argument is not that there is no possible world where the virtual world is *sometimes* better. This is not the objection to our argument. The objection to our argument is whether a virtual world with only virtual evil, where people would be constantly deceived, is a better world than the world we described. Thus, the contention is that a world where the virtual is the only option is a better world than the world we described, to which we replied negatively.

Secondly, being connected to this machine would also mean being an indeterminate blob, while we would like to be a particular person. This is even true for many animals. A dog with a strong attachment to his human companion may feel unhappy if he finds out that his human companion has died. He has been dealing with an inanimate object (like a virtual image of the human companion). Likewise, if a dog dreamed of running in a park, he presumably would not believe that a dream about running is as valuable as actual running. This is because actually experiencing things is intuitively more valuable than not actually experiencing things and only thinking that we did. If someone is skeptical of these examples, one can think of a great ape who has different moral cognitive power and discovers that her son is a robot and not really her son. Thus, a virtual world would not be better than a world where we can experience evil. This, of course, does not mean that sometimes deception is not justified. For example, I am justified in deceiving a rapist who comes to my house and asks for my daughter's whereabouts.

What the theory above shows, however, is that it is not good to live in a world where individuals are *routinely* deceived. Note that this objection would not really challenge our view of God as morally good but imperfect. An imperfect being, just like us humans, may need to be deceitful to achieve greater goods. In Igbo eschatology, it is not rare to conceive of deities as deceitful (Schachter 2022; Hu 2022; Ibeabuchi 2013). Nonetheless, we wish to show that our argument can go beyond that and accommodate other views.

Innate knowledge (knowledge we are somehow born with) would not really change the existence of evil. Even assuming that knowledge of what is good is a necessary condition for acting in morally correct ways, it is indeed not sufficient. One also needs to be inclined to do the right things. This inclination could also be innate as well (Gyekye 2011). But if it were innate, individuals would have no free will and be programmed robots. Hence, not only does innate knowledge not change the question, but it indicates a world that contains less value because individuals here would not be free. This leads to a reply to the second objection. The question that may still concern us is whether a world with no evil at all, but where programmed robots are the norm, is better.

We do not think it is. Take an analogy. Imagine being locked up in a room all your life, experiencing a world where your actions were strictly limited. Still, you could not do any moral wrong: you could only eat, sleep, watch TV, read stories to children, give compliments to friends, and there was no possibility of committing any evil. Would this

be a better world than a world where you chose to do this in the face of bad options? The very fact that you have the freedom to choose what to do, in addition to the fact that you decide to do the right thing, makes this world more valuable, even if evils are committed. Most people would choose this world *because* freedom of choice is valuable, even with the associated risks. The option of the locked room is like the example of someone incarcerated in a maximum-security prison where guards control all their movements. No one, in the face of this possibility, would think that a prisoner's life is better than a free person's life.

Thirdly, the theory offered here seems to imply that people are morally permitted to do evil things just to promote morally good ones. People seem justified in torturing animals for the greater good. As this implication is absurd, then the theory must be false. However, the thesis defended here does not imply that all entities have the right to commit moral evil. Not everyone is allowed to commit evil, because the right for someone to do something also depends on the nature of the relationship. For example, a parent may have the right to punish her child for some wrongdoing, but a stranger does not have that right. The relationship determines that the parent can do something that a stranger cannot (Ewuoso and Hall 2019). Hence, just because God can do something, it does not follow that everyone can do the same. God is the guardian of morality, and as such, He is allowed to undertake evils for greater goods that others are not allowed to.[4] Of course, the skeptic can then challenge that God has the right to allow or even cause evil. This right for God could be derived from the fact that He is a creator and a father and because He knows all. This means that He also knows what is the best for individuals.

Additionally, in African ethics, as an ethics of virtue, the right to do something is related to the status one acquires with age, experience, and passage through different stages in life (Menkiti 2018). In African thought, the morality of an action is very much dependent on the agent's identity. If the agent is one with a certain status acquired through experience, then this agent is morally entitled to make important decisions.

Elders are those who have passed through different life stages and, as such, have the right to intervene; a privilege that those who have not passed through these stages of experience do not have. But a virtuous elder would only harm animals if this were necessary; she would not harm animals gratuitously (Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2018). Note that although the conclusion of our argument is similar to perspectives taken by philosophers such as Swinburne, the rationale is slightly different from other views in a meaningful way. Unlike the theistic view, it is not only the father/creator category that is relevant in the African position. The status of the person allowed to commit evils for the greater good is the status of someone who has gained sufficient knowledge, experience, and virtue to do so.

The theory also has the advantage of matching important moral intuitions about the treatment of animals. Firstly, note that we routinely consider that some individuals with certain backgrounds and purposes are entitled to carry out some harms that others are not. For example, due to their profession, veterinarians are allowed to inflict some pain on animals for the greater good. A psychopath, however, does not have the same right to inflict the same amount of pain on an animal. Secondly, we do not routinely think that an elephant or a dog has the same level of moral status as a mosquito. The theory explains why: the dog and the elephant have a higher communal capacity than a mosquito (Metz 2017). Thirdly, the approach offers a decolonized outlook on animal ethics to the extent that it does not prescribe norms according to a culturally biased perspective on what animal practices ought to be carried out (or not). That is, it does not prescribe that practices that harm animals in the West are more morally acceptable than those in other parts of the world. Instead, it takes a neutral approach, without preferring, say, rodeos or animal farming over ritual animal slaughtering practices.

Fourthly, it is likely that there are many events whereby animals suffer and nothing is learned from it. For example, a deer is struck by lightning in the middle of nowhere and is seen by no-one. Our theory cannot explain such events as this. There are, however, three possible replies here. One is that this objection is not proven. It may be the case that in the future, suffering would bring about a greater good, for example, a great scientific

discovery. The example does not suffice to prove that our theory is wrong. It would need to be an example of a very pervasive kind that would undermine the argument about social harmony. Another response is that we do not claim that the theory is true; instead, we are providing a *skeptical* defense, in which the goal is not to affirm the theory's truth but to show the arguments from the atheist do not succeed.

Furthermore, the task of explaining each particular evil cannot be what is requested from the atheist, given that this would make it impossible to disprove the atheist position. This would be an impossible task because there are recurring evils. Hence, what can be required instead is that the theory has solid explanatory powers, which we believe our arguments do.

Additionally, there is a logical mistake in the rationale underlying the objection whereby all we need to show is that existing evils are instances of the minimum number of evils the world could have. The rationale underlying the objection is that this theory is mistaken because if all evils were lesser evils, then this would mean we live in the best of all possible worlds. It is impossible to imagine a better possible world, where there is a smaller quantity of evil. Underlying this argument is the idea of the best of all possible worlds. For our argument to be correct, this world must be the best of all possible worlds. If this is not the best of all possible worlds, then God did not just allow lesser evils to prevent greater evils; He also allowed different kinds of evils according to this argument.

Nonetheless, there is confusion in this objection regarding God's duty to offer the best of all possible worlds. In particular, note that for every world made, it is logically possible to add more goodness (e.g., a bit more generosity, love, and care) and, thereby, diminish the quantity of evil. Hence, it is impossible to conceive the best of all possible worlds, as there is always the possibility of a better world than the world that God made (Plantinga 1974; Van Inwagen 2008).

Consequently, the best of all possible worlds cannot be the result of what God must and can do: if 'ought' implies can, and it is impossible to reach the maximum good, then it is also not what God ought to do to achieve the maximum good by eliminating evil. Instead, because there is no possible way to limit how much better a world could be, all that can be prescribed is that God limits evils in the world. Put differently, the decision as to what quantity of good or evil is allowed in the actual world must be arbitrary because there is no way to draw the line and, thereby, what is prescribed is that God limits the evils in the world. Nonetheless, if this is true, all that needs to be proven is that the world could contain more evils than it does. As it is possible to imagine a world worse than this one (e.g., a world where there are 767 more animals suffering), then, according to our proposal, it seems that God has fulfilled His duty.

8. Conclusions

To conclude, in this article, we addressed the problem of evil and, more specifically, the question of animal suffering from an Afro-communitarian viewpoint. We challenged the idea that current theodicies and defenses offer a satisfactory explanation of the problem of animal suffering. Most of these theories rely on concepts and ideas which are to be looked at with skepticism. For example, one of the competing supernaturalist theories contends that animals do not suffer or that their suffering is not sufficiently morally relevant. We then offered what we think is a reasonable explanation for the problem of animal suffering. Such suffering enables forms of communion, thereby allowing both animals and humans to be subjects and/or objects of communion. This theory, we maintain, is a better explanation than the alternatives. Afro-communitarianism offers new insight into the problem of evil grounded on a decolonial relational ontology and ethics. More precisely, by looking at the world as relational, it perceives animal suffering as an element of this relationality. This is a new perspective on the problem of animal suffering, considering relationality, that has not yet been addressed.

Furthermore, as we argued, this offers a more plausible explanation for the problem of evil. This is because the relational approach does not fall into the same philosophical

problems as its rival theories and, thereby, offers a view with a stronger explanatory power. The Afro-communitarian view has not yet been explored at length as a plausible theory of animal ethics. Further research ought to be conducted to explore this Afro-communitarian animal ethics.

Notes

[1] The term 'Afro-communitarianism' refers to the salient African view that the greatest moral value is social harmony (that is, solidarity and identification). This can be found in the work of philosophers such as Thaddeus Metz, Rianna Oelofsen, Motsamai Molefe, and Cornelius Ewuoso, amongst others.

[2] Something is logically possible if it does not contradict the laws of logic. For instance, a square circle or a married bachelor are self-contradictory terms and, thereby, violate the laws of logic. Atheists have challenged supernaturalism on the grounds that it is logically inconsistent.

[3] The term 'Shona' refers to a Bantu language used by the Shona people of Zimbabwe and South Africa.

[4] In African thought, this is also the case about some living dead, but we do not address this point here.

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