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Progress on the Problem of Evil

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ABSTRACT

A standard reaction to the problem of evil is to look for a greater good that can explain why God (with the traditional attributes) might have created this world instead of a seemingly better one which has no (or less) evil. This paper proposes an approach we call the *Moral Progress Approach*: Given the value of progress, a non-perfect world containing evil may be preferable to a perfect world without evil. This makes room for the possibility that this world, with all its evil, may be preferable to a world with less evil. We argue that our proposal is different from apparently similar views such as soul-making theodicy.

KEYWORDS Moral progress; problem of evil; soul making; theodicy

1. The problem

One can imagine – and so it seems possible for God to create – a world different from this world, similar but without some – or many – of this world’s disvalues or outright evil. The traditional characteristics attributed to God require that God prefers the better world. The existence of this world, with all its evil, seems to challenge the existence of, and therefore the reasons for, believing in God. This is the so-called *problem of evil*. William Rowe writes:

There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse (Rowe 1979, 336).

To counter Rowe (as read by the greater-good theodicies), one must identify a greater good secured by the evil in this world or else face the unwelcome consequences that follow from preventing that evil. We propose what we call the *Moral Progress Approach* as a way of dealing with the problem(s) of evil, and we defend some possible claims about it. Our primary claim is that moral progress and the value of moral progress have been widely neglected in these discussions.

Moral Progress Approach: Given the value of progress, a non-perfect world containing evil may be preferable to a perfect world without evil; and this world, with all its evil, may be preferable to a world with less evil.

One might find this just unintuitive, objecting that if it is up to us to decide, we would prefer a perfect world to live in rather than a progressing world. Two points are due to overcome this initial obstacle. First, it is not obvious that this preference of us is informed. It seems that the ups and downs of the life, its trajectory or shape, is relevant to well-being (Shafer-Landau 2010, 39–40; Temkin 2012, 111). The rather simple case is two lives with the same amount of overall goodness, one progressing over time and the other regressing over time. It seems clear that the first one is the better one. Now, consider two lives, one starting at some perfect situation, and another which starts close to some perfect situation, but with some way to go. It seems plausible that if we note to the importance of the shape of life, the latter would be preferable. This suggests that perhaps, if we are informed enough, we would prefer a progressing world over a perfect one. This in no way is to claim that *any* progressing world is preferable to the perfect world, but only to stress on the possibility that sometimes this can be the case.

Second, even if it is the case that we would not prefer a progressing world over a perfect one, does this imply that the progressing world is *worse* than a perfect one? The Moral Progress Account needs a negative answer to this question, and here is one way to go. We, as human beings, might prefer a perfect world over a progressing one. Still, this is compatible with the claim that the progressing world is better than the perfect world. These two are compatible, for example, as our (even sound) preference is about what is good for us, but the question about value of worlds and which one should be preferred is not merely about what is good for us. One cannot give a detailed defense of this without also discussing issues in axiology and their relevance to the problem of evil. However, appealing to the distinction good/good-for suggests that the Account has some resources to deal with this objection and is not a nonstarter. (For an overview of the distinction, see Rønnow-Rasmussen 2017b).

This paper offers an outline of how our approach challenges the most widely held assumption concerning the problem of evil, according to which for any given world, it would have been better had that world contained less evil – call it the ‘standard assumption’. This is often merely assumed, and less explicitly stated, as it sounds rather natural. Meanwhile, for example, note how the idea behind the problem of evil is that this world is not the best world, *since* it includes evils. This is why evils are supposed to provide evidences against theism. And to argue that this is the best world is meant to block the argument from evil, suggesting that it is *not* the case that this world would be better had it contained less evil. In other words, this

assumption is behind the arguments from evil, such as Rowe (1979) – this world is not what we expect a good, omnipotent, omniscient God would create; it would be better had it had less evils, as its evils do not serve any greater good and could be prevented without any considerable loss. In the same vein, theistic attempts such as soul-making theodicy or free-will defense discuss the kind of ‘world’ or ‘situation’ we should be in to bring about such and such values. Again, they aim to show that although this world contains evils, it is not worse than a world without such evils, because that world would also lack some other (greater) values.¹

2. The Value of Progress

A few words are required concerning how we intend the terms ‘moral progress’ and ‘evil’. Moral progress can mean progress *in morality*, or it can mean progress that is *morally preferable*. Morality progresses when people become less wicked or more virtuous; when there is an increase in the number of morally right decisions or actions, or a decrease in the number of morally wrong ones; or when there is improvement in people’s theoretical understanding of morally central concepts. An example of morally preferable progress is an increase in well-being or decrease in suffering. That the number of people living in extreme poverty has dropped from over 80% in 1800 to 10% in 2015 is indeed a morally preferable development. One has progress in both senses – progress in morality and morally preferable progress – when the morally preferable change is caused by development in morality.

Discussions around the concept of evil reflect this distinction. Evil can be either a moral quality or a morally undesirable state of affairs. It may refer to wickedness, or it may concern suffering that may – but need not – be caused by morally wrong decisions or wicked character. As we use ‘moral progress’, it covers both improvement in moral qualities and any decrease in suffering. In the first case, one may speak of moral progress in the narrow sense: *morality’s* progress; in the second, of moral progress in the wide sense.² With this in mind, our approach is intended to explain why the ‘standard assumption’ concerning the problem of evil is or at least might be false: i.e., how it is conceivable that this world is not worse (or even better) than another possible world with less evil. That is to suggest a way to acknowledge the existence of evils in the world and, at the same time, to deny that such evils provide evidence against theism. Generally, the main strategy is that of greater-good theodicies.

One can defend an account like the Moral Progress Approach by appealing to familiar debates over the value of moral progress (see, for example, e.g. Rønnow-Rasmussen 2017a, 140–141). Moral progress springs from various sources, of which one is arguably the most important:

when moral progress is considered intrinsically valuable, one thinks first of all of the change itself as valuable.³ It is not merely the end point of progress that makes it valuable; progress itself has value (Egonsson 2018, 6–7). A change from very bad to much less bad can sometimes be morally preferable to an ongoing state of goodness. All other things equal, the value of change for the better in morality may be intrinsically higher than that of change for the better in well-being: in which case moral progress in the narrow sense is more intrinsically valuable than moral progress in the wide sense. This raises an interesting point that will not, however, affect the argument here.

If progress itself is valuable, one can think of two types of cases. In the first, the object – an individual, a society, the world, etc. – has always been held to be of high moral value. In the second, the object is presently considered to be of high moral value but has not always been so. As long as the focus is on present state, the two look the same. When taking a longer-term view on moral progress, however, there is value in the second that is absent from the first.

Consider the two cases as two possible worlds. Although the second is worse than the first in at least one regard, since it was at some point less morally valuable, one can imagine that the value of progress obtained is significant enough to make it better overall than the first: which is to say that staying at the moral high point is outweighed by progress towards that point. A God who maximizes value would choose the second world. There is something better than merely being good: namely, *becoming* good; likewise, there can be something better than perfection: *moving toward* perfection (or simply getting better). In discussions about the problem of evil, it is all too often assumed that the best option is perfection.

Before getting into this, a caveat is required. The Account does not necessarily challenge the idea that what provides evidence for or against theism (in this context) is sums of values of the worlds. But the claim is that sums of values should be comprehensive enough to include value of progress (or regress). In other words, it suggests that currently some things of value are neglected. As noted, progress is itself valuable, but it is not like pleasure and pain, it is a value of higher-level – it itself depends on other things which themselves are good and bad. Expectedly, doing so complicates the way we can calculate the sums of values. Aside from epistemological worries, we need to think of the ways to assign weight to different things as well as considering many different trajectories worlds can have (progress with backslidings, merely progress, how much of each, and so on and so forth).

Back to perfection and moving toward perfection. The existence of evil permits the possibility of a richer form of moral progress: that is, one can find value in a kind of moral progress that cannot logically be achieved without

evil's existence. Should the world reach a state in which evil no longer exists, then no further progress can be made in that regard.

Our approach uses the same strategy as other approaches that suggest a greater good to block the empirical premise of Rowe's argument. Among the suggestions for a greater good are 'free will, moral responsibility, a law-governed physical universe, improved moral character, improved psychological wholeness and deeper union with God' (Mooney 2017, 3). We think that moral progress is a worthy candidate for addition to this list.⁴

The way we have chosen for presenting our Moral Progress Approach is only one way of cashing it out; it is open to other possibilities. Our manner of presentation might suggest that ours is a consequentialist response to a deontological problem. In truth, we intend our account to be neutral on this point: one *could* take a consequentialist approach, but one need not do so, and we would not commit to doing so. Our presentation is motivated solely by the way the problem of evil is normally presented (see, for example, Dougherty 2011, 563; Mooney 2017, 79).

3. Distinctiveness

The Moral Progress Approach may, and probably should, sound similar to other approaches – especially John Hick's *soul-making theodicy* (Hick 1977, originally 1966), along with approaches inspired by it. All share the same basic strategy: achieving a greater good made possible by the existence of evil.⁵

We regard our approach as nevertheless distinct from Hick's and its kin. In particular, the Moral Progress Approach is immune to some of the objections to soul-making theodicy. The main idea behind Hick's theodicy is the value of 'soul making': people becoming virtuous through their own efforts (Dougherty 2011, 570; see also Gelinias 2009a, 553n41).

Defenders of soul-making theodicy have difficulty responding to objections such as those discussed (briefly) by Michael Tooley (Michael Tooley 2015, sec. 7.1): (a) a soul-making theodicy cannot explain some of the horrible suffering that occurs, such as in terminal illnesses or the Holocaust; (b) it cannot justify the suffering of non-human animals; (c) it cannot justify the suffering of children; (d) it faces the further challenge that this world is not *prima facie* a good place for soul making: for example, many people die young before they have had any real chance to work on their moral self-improvement.

By contrast, the Moral Progress Approach can provide a response. Horrible suffering and terminal disease pave the way for moral progress – even great moral progress. The more horrible the suffering, the more pointless from the perspective of soul-making theodicy, while simultaneously the more valuable the progress to a better state. This is true of human and non-

human animal suffering alike. If the suffering of children does not make sense in terms of soul making, then so much the better for the moral progress reflected in an ultimate decrease in their suffering.

Allow that the world in its present state is not a good place for soul making. Allow further that, in the future, it may change for the better in this regard. The Moral Progress Approach can make sense of this, whereas soul-making theodicy can only explain the value of the future state – not the present one.

Consider a future world where everybody is a morally good person and all requisite soul making is done; one can still ask why God did not create an even *better* world: that is, a world suited for soul making from the very beginning. That is a question to which soul-making theodicy has no answer. However, the longer one has lived in a world ill-suited for soul making, the more welcome a change for the better: something the Moral Progress Approach *is* equipped to explain.

Further understanding of the distinctiveness of the Moral Progress Approach requires diagnosis of its critical differences from other approaches relying on the greater good:

The Moral Progress Approach allows that moral progress can take place on different levels, from different perspectives. Of course, one needs to be able to talk about the value of personal moral progress, as soul-making theodicy does; but one also needs to talk about the progress of social groups, societies, countries, and humanity in general. Just as individuals can become morally better individuals, the world can become a better world and the human species can become a better species.

In this way, the Moral Progress Approach can make at least a degree of sense of most if not all instances of evil. One could argue that no evil is truly pointless or void of value (see Gelinas 2009b, 262) so long as the possibility exists for progressing to a better state. If there is a possible future in which one perceives change for the better, not even the perpetual evils from which humanity seems to have learned nothing need be devoid of purpose, since they offer the opportunity for a greater change in value than lesser evils from which society readily progresses. The more meaningless an instance of evil from the perspective of other ‘greater good’ approaches, the more valuable any change for the better from the perspective of moral progress. The very meaninglessness of evil becomes a source of value when it comes to moral progress.

We are not claiming that the value of progressing from a pointlessly evil state *always* outweighs the negative value of being in it. We claim only that the erasure of a negative value is, of itself, the creation of a positive value: a positive value that would not have been possible without the prior existence of the negative value, and which under the right circumstances may outweigh the negative value.

The proposed approach is not open to some of the challenges to soul-making theodicy. Observe that the notion of progress we are describing is not dependent on any specific view on free will. In particular, the Moral Progress Approach is not dependent on any libertarian-style view of human freedom; it works even if one rejects the idea that (a) such freedom is valuable (or perhaps even possible) and (b) can be appealed to as the point of evil. Even in the absence of free will of any kind – compatibilist or libertarian – the possibility of meaningful improvement remains: my developing into a more virtuous person is desirable whether or not it is a result of my own decisions. In a similar vein, the Moral Progress Approach does not invite the strong patient-centered requirement according to which ‘for any natural evil, the evil in question must be outweighed by positive moral responses in the life of the one who suffers the evil in order for it to be justified’ (Gelinas 2009a, 543). As noted earlier, the proposed approach is *not* focused solely on the lives of persons.

If the only true value lies in human freedom, then the acute worry arises ‘whether the value associated with securing, or increasing the scope of, human freedom is great enough to outweigh the disvalue of the natural evils necessary for this to take place’ (Gelinas 2009a, 541) – more so than if another kind of value must also be considered, as our Moral Progress Approach claims. This we see as to its advantage.

Consider that the function of evil in soul-making theodicy is to enable improvement in moral character. For this to take place, however, good and evil need not have any objective existence; the moral character of one’s thoughts and actions is wholly determined by what the agent has subjective reason to believe. The soul-making value of the helping behaviour you display to another person is the same whether or not she actually needs your help, so long as she needs it from your perspective. This might strike one as problematic. On our Moral Progress Approach, by contrast, both the improved quality of your character and the improved quality of life of the person you help count.

Hick seems committed to the idea that suffering and evil need to be real for soul-making theodicy to work:

Unselfishness would never be evoked in a situation in which no one was ever in real need Courage would never be evoked in an environment devoid of all dangers Most important of all, the capacity to love would never be developed, except in a very limited sense of the word, in a world in which there was no such thing as suffering (Hick 1977, 325).

If Hick is claiming that dangers, suffering and so on must have objective existence for there to be such things as genuine virtue and love, then we believe he is wrong. Once again, the quality and value of virtues and their development seem to depend on nothing other than what one has subjective

reason to believe (or possibly what one actually believes, whether or not one has reason to do so).

Unselfishness is preparedness to sacrifice oneself for the needs one sees in others. Courage is facing what one believes to be dangers. One's care and concern for another does not need adjusted to the objective facts of one's situation for one's love to be genuine: quite the contrary. Being more concerned than the facts demand may actually be a sign of true love.

Hick famously developed his theodicy based on St. Irenaeus' of Lyons idea that 'ALL THINGS HAVE BEEN CREATED FOR THE SERVICE OF MAN . . . therefore the creation is suited to [the wants of] man; for man was not made for its sake, but creation for the sake of man' (*Against Heresies*, Book V, Chapter XXIX). Even Hick sees a 'danger of anthropocentrism' (Hick 1977, 259) in this; and we do not believe that his attempts to steer clear from this danger succeed. According to his theodicy, the point of the universe is the perfecting of human beings. The Moral Progress Approach claims something different: the moral progress of human beings is part of the world's *raison d'être*; another is the goal of a decrease in suffering generally. This is not only less open to accusations of speciesism; the story it tells is also a more metaphysically neutral one. Human beings are *not* the ultimate explanation for everything in the universe, and indeed need not be an explanation for much in it at all. Anthropocentrism comes in degrees. The Moral Progress Approach leaves open the possibility to retain the idea of human beings having an exceptional place in Creation: namely, if moral progress (in the narrow sense: that is, morality's progress) is more valuable than simply a decrease in suffering. The choice to leave this question open is deliberate. One may argue that the existence of humanity is essential for the magnitude of progress. Happiness, an end to suffering, and eventually reaching universal perfection are not enough; moral progress also requires the making of uniquely *human* souls. But of course, there is a negative aspect to taking such an approach: human existence may help to complete Creation, but only because it was an essential part of the evil of the outset.

Accepting the Moral Progress Approach has positive practical implications. Being good and doing good increases the evidence for believing in God: strengthening the case for theism, if such is one's ambition, by making it more than a matter of mere argumentation. As the proverb says, actions speak louder than words. By looking at moral progress the way it does, the Moral Progress Approach has wider scope than soul-making theodicy: it motivates one to improve the world regardless of whether doing so effects one's self-improvement.

The coin we offer has another side, not to be neglected. Opponents of our approach can argue that it *promotes* evil, since evil's eradication is meant to bring about good. Some might even use our approach to argue perversely that evil *is* good. However, we will simply assume that the most basic

motivation for both proponents and opponents of a theodicy is not (or not merely) the prospect of philosophical success but a desire to make sense of this world's wretchedness – and not to encourage the spread of evil for the ultimate sake of good.

There is an ineffable mystery built into Hick's theodicy that is not present in our approach: 'the mystery of dysteleological suffering is a real mystery, impenetrable to the rationalizing human mind'; without this mystery, Hick believes that people would not do 'the right [thing] simply *because* it is right and without any expectation of reward' (Hick 1977, 335). Remember our claim that the more pointless an evil state is, the more valuable the progress from that state to a better one. The more undeserved suffering there is in the world, the more valuable the change to a world in which no undeserved suffering remains. There is no mystery here: evil that is pointless from other perspectives *has* a point from the perspective of moral progress.

Hick's soul-making theodicy threatens, if not an actual paradox, a curious result: if soul-making theodicy succeeds in explaining why there must be a mystery intrinsic to soul making, then the mystery of evil disappears. If, on the other hand, the proponents of soul making insist it to be part of God's plan that human beings not be able to rationalize evil even from the perspective of soul making, then they have either outsmarted God or arrived at a theodicy that cannot explain the existence of evil.

4. Approaching Theodicy

The ambition of this paper is humble: to suggest that attention be directed to a neglected value of moral progress that is relevant to the discussion of the problem of evil. To address – or perhaps even solve – the problem of evil with its help, one would first need to produce evidence for moral progress over time, then make the axiological claim that progress from bad to good can, at least in certain instances, be better than a continuing state of good, or even progress from good to better. We believe there is something to be said in defence of both claims.

Whether valid or not, the idea that the human species has made and continues to make moral progress is widespread. Examples abound that allegedly testify to that progress: the abolition of slavery; the endorsement by many of equal rights regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender; the inclusion of non-human animals into the moral community.⁶ Steven Pinker (2011; see also 2012) has famously argued that human violence has shown a remarkable decrease over time. The independent watchdog organization Freedom House found global trends in freedom and democracy at the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one highly promising. From 1972 – when it started publishing its annual Freedom in the World Report – until 2006, Freedom House observed a dramatic increase in the number of

'free' (from 43 to 89) and partly 'free' (from 38 to 58) countries. The number of non-'free' countries fell over the same period, from 69 to 45. Unfortunately, 2006 saw the start of a global slide annually (House *n.d.*). Still, the net effect over the entire period has been significant societal progress.

One might reasonably argue for a kind of narrative value, not only in the improvement of quality of life over the course of one's lifetime but also in the general improvement of valuable states in the world. One may well prefer a life with a bad start and a good ending over a life that ends as good as it began, just as one might prefer a world that has developed into something good over a world that has always been that way.

That said, one might argue that that preference becomes more doubtful when applied to one's own children. Shouldn't one, as a caring parent – so the argument goes – wish for as good as possible of a life for one's children from the very beginning? Maybe that is so; but it is worth noting that the Bible offers reason to think otherwise. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father celebrates the return of his younger son who has squandered his heritage. When the older, dutiful son gets angry and refuses to join the party, his father tells him, 'my son . . . you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found' (Luke 15:11–32, NIV: Bible Gateway *n.d.*). Even though the father would never say that he values what his younger son has done over the life choices of his conscientious older son, one might nevertheless judge from his actions that he actually does something like that: to wit, he seems happier over his younger son's return than his elder son's faithful persistence. Even stronger evidence pointing in the same direction comes from the Parable of the Lost Sheep, where Jesus says that 'there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent' (Luke 15:7, NIV: Bible Gateway *n.d.*). This is a pretty strong commendation of moral progress!

What one seems to end up with is a theodicy based on God's own values. God seems to prefer the combination of a state of goodness and progress towards that state over a state of goodness alone. Possibly something similar is true at the other end of the value spectrum: God prefers a permanent state of evil over a regress from good to bad. Is it not because of this that Satan is described as a fallen angel: i.e., someone who has fallen from grace? The historical personification of evil in Christianity and Islam is of such a fall. Satan would not make a more tragic figure had he been wicked from the beginning of his existence: quite the opposite. In similar fashion, an ordinary person with ordinary opportunities starting good and going bad strikes many people as worse than a person who was bad/evil all along.

One can further conjecture that there will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one bad world that progresses toward good than over 99 good worlds with no need to make progress. Of course, it is one thing to understand why this world looks the way it does given God's (presumed) values; it is quite another to be prepared to embrace those values. A successful theodicy requires that one can make sense of the suffering in this world both from God's normative perspective and one's own. One cannot claim to have solved the problem of evil unless and until one is prepared (in some sense) to accept the evil. Should one accept slavery, the Holocaust, the oppression of women throughout history, and so on? To do so might seem cynical, at best.

It is important to understand that such acceptance is in no way equivalent to saying that the abolition of slavery made the existence of slavery worthwhile or that the end of the Holocaust made the Holocaust worthwhile. It takes more than the ending of a terrible thing to justify it from the perspective of progress.

The ultimate value of any given instance of progress is determined by various factors that cannot be discussed in detail here. However, two such factors are probably the quality of the end state and its durability. A change from -10 to $+10$ (according to some quality metric) is more valuable than a change from -10 to 0 ; while a change from -10 to $+10$ where the end state lasts forever is more valuable than the same change where the end state is fleeting. Another factor is how long one must endure present circumstances of evil or suffering.

It is possible that one cannot justify the world's suffering until one knows that it will eventually disappear altogether. At minimum, one needs to know the quality of the state one is presently in and how long it is likely to last.

To prefer progress towards eternal bliss over being in a permanent state of bliss may not strike one as strange, at least so long as the suffering left behind has a limited durability. Still, no algorithm will offer the optimal proportion of factors – including but doubtless not limited to quantity, quality and durability of present evil/suffering; rate of change from evil to good; quantity, quality and durability of good in the end state – that will make for a more valuable outcome than permanent goodness. Any mathematics here will be complex as well as inexact. On the negative side of the ledger are the total number of evil states and any occasional change for the worse (granting that regress is a negative value); on the positive side are the total number of good states and any change for the better. We believe that an optimal proportion of state and progress values will limit the quantity of negative values that enable progress: i.e., it is not necessary to conclude that God would create the worst possible world to pave the way for positive change.

At the same time, we think that the undeservedness of the suffering in this process is an essential part of the value. Still, there is no genuine conflict between the value of justice and the value of progress. The value we ascribe to

progress is based on it being a progression from a state of injustice to one of justice. The problem of evil is a problem of undeserved suffering. For our approach to have full force it must not shy away from addressing this. It does so not because it stresses moral value decoupled from justice but because it claims that sometimes justice received can be preferable to merely having a just state to begin with.

5. Concluding Remarks

If moral progress has final value, one must accept a God who is unable to create a world containing that value without also allowing evil. Progress, as we understand it, logically entails going from something less than optimally good to something better. *Contra* Descartes, we assume that God is bound by the laws of logic. (Otherwise, there would *be* no problem of evil.)⁷ If God is bound by the laws of logic, then there will necessarily be reduced value in a state of eternal bliss not preceded by progression. A creation that progresses towards eternal bliss is a compromise, but so is a creation that is blissful from the start. In the first, one regrets the presence of evil; in the second, an absence of progress.

The Moral Progress Approach points to a neglected source of value that makes room for the possibility that this world, with all its evil, might turn out to be preferable to a perfect world (if a ‘perfect’ world is even meaningful) or one with less evil. It provides the ground for a tentative theodicy: something that requires further exploration. Our approach is conceptually distinct from other, similar approaches such as soul-making theodicy; and this is enough to make it attractive, if only as one element of a hybrid view. It should even appeal to those who take soul-making theodicy to be successful or the argument from evil to be unassailable. At the very least, the Moral Progress Approach brings into focus something of value that is too easily passed over. More ambitiously, even if the Moral Progress Approach fails as theodicy it may still be as close to a solution to the problem of evil as one can get.

Notes

1. An even more general approach could be formulated in terms of progress *simpliciter*, focusing on the value of improvement from a less to a more valuable state of affairs, regardless of whether the domain of value is moral, prudential, or aesthetic. If one wonders why God has not created a world of absolute beauty – presuming it is in God’s powers as a being almighty – one’s answer will take a parallel form to the present discussion.
2. We claim that the very process of change to something better is intrinsically valuable and that this captures the value one normally identifies with moral progress. That said, could it not be that the value of the end state gets its ultimate value from the very fact that one had to struggle to get there? In that

case, it's not the process itself that is valuable but the destination, so that the process of getting there is but a condition to achieving the final value. Nothing prevents us from accepting this analysis; indeed, we agree that the value of progress is at least partly determined by the value of the permanent state it results in. Our judgment is simply that this is not the usual way in which progress is justified. When we claim that the change itself is valuable – the process – we have in mind a value conditioned on the value of the end point, *not* the other way around. The path to an unusually valuable end point gets additional extrinsic value from this fact, over and above the intrinsic value of being a change for the better. Observe that while final or non-instrumental value can be either intrinsic or final, intrinsic value is always final (see Korsgaard 1983). We are grateful to Wlodek Rabinowicz for pressing us on this point.

3. One might argue that if progress can help theism to deal with the problem of evil, regress should be counted as an evidence against theism. But it doesn't seem to be the case. Thus, a *modus tollens* leads to the rejection of the antecedent – it is not the case that progress can help theism to deal with the problem of evil. In response, we acknowledge that regress in the world affects the sums of values of the world negatively. That is, if progress is relevant, regress is also relevant and can provide evidence. However, the proposal is that the value of progress is *relevant* to the debates over the problem of evil and that it suggests an underexplored direction for developing a form of progress theodicy. It is not claimed that the whole debate *merely* depends on this matter. Therefore, since progress alone does not provide evidence for theism, regress alone does not provide evidence against theism. Thanks to the anonymous referee for raising this issue.
4. With regard to worries raised by anti-theodiscists, we believe that although the Moral Progress Account shares some features with some of the more familiar theodiscies, it has its own resources to deal with such worries. Here we only argue for the distinctiveness of the Account, but examining it in dealing with anti-theodiscies requires separate discussions.
5. Such claims are, of course, contested by sceptics of moral progress, who maintain that slavery is more common today than ever, the rights of millions are violated on a daily basis, innocent people are murdered on an ongoing basis in meaningless wars, and more livestock than ever are raised for food on factory farms.
6. The current discussion is focused on the evidential problem of evil. Logical inconsistency is mentioned merely to explain why the existence of evils does not automatically provide evidence against theism and that progress and its value need to be taken into account: a progressing world has values which are absent in a perfect world, and existence of evils are logically necessary for such values to obtain. God, bounded by laws of logic, has no other way to reach those values.
7. For example, it might be developed in terms of skeptical theism. The skeptical theist can, in light of the complexity of the value of moral progress, attempt to block the problem of evil, claiming that not enough is known about the value of moral progress and how much weight to put on it.

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