

Silk Takes A Stab At The 'Problem Of Evil'

The Urth list — 8 messages, 5 voices, 12 Apr 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5993>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Daniel Petersen — 12 Apr 2011, 23:39

Any philosophy of religion or theology students out there? Is Silk arguing something of a 'freewill' theodicy here that still trades on a strong view of divine sovereignty?

<http://silkandhornheresy.blogspot.com/2011/04/silk-takes-stab-at-problem-of-evil.html>

-DOJP

Lane Haygood — 13 Apr 2011, 00:03 · in reply to Daniel Petersen

Silk is arguing that the Outsider is not an occasionalist God. He doesn't control everything, and permits Evil (as a concept and metaphysical whole) because in the end Evil serves his great Purpose (which Man might not know). Little evils (like tsunamis that kill thousands) are because the Outsider does not intervene or even control all events - God does not authorize every event as if he is a foreman at a construction site - but rather lets things flow organically.

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 12, 2011, at 6:39 PM, Daniel Petersen <danielottojackpetersen at gmail.com> wrote:
Any philosophy of religion or theology students out there? Is Silk arguing something of a 'freewill' theodicy here that still trades on a strong view of divine sovereignty?

<http://silkandhornheresy.blogspot.com/2011/04/silk-takes-stab-at-problem-of-evil.html>

-DOJP

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 13 Apr 2011, 00:12 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Elsewhere in tBotLS, Silk has an insight that strikes me heavily. I can't recall where it is, but it occurs to him that the purpose of free will is to give us the grace of consenting to what is going to happen anyway.

On Tue, Apr 12, 2011 at 5:03 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:
Silk is arguing that the Outsider is not an occasionalist God. He doesn't control everything, and permits Evil (as a concept and metaphysical whole) because in the end Evil serves his great Purpose (which Man might not know). Little evils (like tsunamis that kill thousands) are because the Outsider does not intervene or even control all events - God does not authorize every event as if he is a foreman at a construction site - but rather lets things flow organically.

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 12, 2011, at 6:39 PM, Daniel Petersen
<danielottojackpetersen at gmail.com> wrote:

Any philosophy of religion or theology students out there? "Is Silk arguing

something of a 'freewill' theodicy here that still trades on a strong view of divine sovereignty"
<http://silkandhornheresy.blogspot.com/2011/04/silk-takes-stab-at-problem-of-evil.html>
-DOJP

David Stockhoff — 13 Apr 2011, 03:28 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Much like consenting to be governed by a king.

On 4/12/2011 8:12 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:
Elsewhere in tBotLS, Silk has an insight that strikes me heavily. I can't recall where it is, but it occurs to him that the purpose of free will is to give us the grace of consenting to what is going to happen anyway.

On Tue, Apr 12, 2011 at 5:03 PM, Lane Haygood<lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:

Silk is arguing that the Outsider is not an occasionalist God. He doesn't control everything, and permits Evil (as a concept and metaphysical whole) because in the end Evil serves his great Purpose (which Man might not know). Little evils (like tsunami that kill thousands) are because the Outsider does not intervene or even control all events - God does not authorize every event as if he is a foreman at a construction site - but rather lets things flow organically.

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 12, 2011, at 6:39 PM, Daniel Petersen
<danielottojackpetersen at gmail.com> wrote:

Any philosophy of religion or theology students out there? Is Silk arguing something of a 'freewill' theodicy here that still trades on a strong view of divine sovereignty?
<http://silkandhornheresy.blogspot.com/2011/04/silk-takes-stab-at-problem-of-evil.html>
-DOJP

Daniel Petersen — 13 Apr 2011, 09:30 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Lane Haygood<lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:
Silk is arguing that the Outsider is not an occasionalist God. He doesn't control everything, and permits Evil (as a concept and metaphysical whole) because in the end Evil serves his great Purpose (which Man might not know).
Little evils (like tsunami that kill thousands) are because the Outsider does not intervene or even control all events - God does not authorize every event as if he is a foreman at a construction site - but rather lets things flow organically.

Ok, Lane, right, so Silk's conception of God (the Outsider) is not 'occasionalist' (i.e. God *directly* causes all things), but the fact that God 'permits' evil and forces it to serve his purposes 'however unwillingly' seems to fit in with Aquinas' scheme of primary and secondary causation.

Evil is personified by Silk as *hating* God, yet it is 'harnessed' by God so that it 'serves' him by pointing us who get hurt by evil back to God for our true love and goodness and purpose.

I think I agree with you that he's arguing that the Outsider allows his creation to 'flow organically', but I just want to point out that Silk is still conceiving of a God very much 'in control' in that his 'permissive will' is orchestrating (if you like) all things towards his desired ends (which, though many are unknown as you point out, yet Silk takes a major known end to be that of love between creature and Creator).

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Elsewhere in tBotLS, Silk has an insight that strikes me heavily. I can't recall where it is, but it occurs to him that the purpose of free will is to give us the grace of consenting to what is going to happen anyway.

Dan'l, I vaguely recall that too. It'd be good if we could find the exact quote. I want to qualify that thought with the notion that those freewill creatures are still somehow genuinely significant in their choices, that our part in 'what is going to happen anyway' (or 'consenting to be governed by a King' as David Stockhoff said) really 'makes a difference' somehow.

However, I'm not sure whether that's Silk's or Wolfe's view. Wolfe has kept me guessing on this. Sometimes he sounds pretty hard determinist (especially, as I seem to recall, in certain passages of tBotNS). Yet the dramas he plays out sound more libertarian. I know a compatibilist would say that's just how things look but it's all causally determined even if our 'choices' are 'real' based on our desires (which are determined by all that comes before us). Is there any room for any kind of libertarian freewill in Wolfe?

-DOJP

On Wed, Apr 13, 2011 at 4:28 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:
Much like consenting to be governed by a king.

On 4/12/2011 8:12 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Elsewhere in tBotLS, Silk has an insight that strikes me heavily. I can't recall where it is, but it occurs to him that the purpose of free will is to give us the grace of consenting to what is going to happen anyway.

On Tue, Apr 12, 2011 at 5:03 PM, Lane Haygood<lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:

Silk is arguing that the Outsider is not an occasionalist God. He doesn't control everything, and permits Evil (as a concept and metaphysical whole)

because in the end Evil serves his great Purpose (which Man might not know).

Little evils (like tsunamis that kill thousands) are because the Outsider does not intervene or even control all events - God does not authorize every

event as if he is a foreman at a construction site - but rather lets things

flow organically.

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 12, 2011, at 6:39 PM, Daniel Petersen
<danielottojackpetersen at gmail.com> wrote:

Any philosophy of religion or theology students out there? Is Silk arguing something of a 'freewill' theodicy here that still trades on a strong

view
of divine sovereignty?

<http://silkandhornheresy.blogspot.com/2011/04/silk-takes-stab-at-problem-of-evil.html>
-DOJP

Lane Haygood — 13 Apr 2011, 14:01 · in reply to Daniel Petersen

Ok, Lane, right, so Silk's conception of God (the Outsider) is not 'occasionalist' (i.e. God *directly* causes all things), but the fact that God 'permits' evil and forces it to serve his purposes 'however unwillingly' seems to fit in with Aquinas' scheme of primary and secondary causation. ?Evil is personified by Silk as *hating* God, yet it is 'harnessed' by God so that it 'serves' him by pointing us who get hurt by evil back to God for our true love and goodness and purpose.

I would say rather that God, as the first cause of all things, is the cause of evil as well as good, and while men are good at identifying little-e evil (the bad things that happen) we are not always good at identifying big-E Evil (the form of Evil, from which all little-e evils are instances), but regardless, all evil/Evil is ultimately part of God's plan. This sounds a lot like the unknown purposes theodicy, with bits of the soul-making thrown around. It's a fairly standard type of theodicy: bad stuff happens but God is God and has some reason for it all.

I think I agree with you that he's arguing that the Outsider allows his creation to 'flow organically', but I just want to point out that Silk is still conceiving of a God very much 'in control' in that his 'permissive will' is orchestrating (if you like) all things towards his desired ends (which, though many are unknown as you point out, yet Silk takes a major known end to be that of love between creature and Creator).

Sure. I didn't mean to make Silk out to be a deist. For Silk's God (and presumably, Wolfe's) desire and control are the same thing; remember, for the problem of evil to have any gravity at all God must be both perfectly powerful and perfectly good. Thus, what God desires, is, and God would not, as perfectly good, desire that which he could not do.

The problem of evil is an interesting logical exercise, but I have never been ultimately convinced of its efficacy (even as a non-believer). It, like the ontological argument, comes laden with value presuppositions that are rarely made explicit, and it is filled with nonsensical logical wrangling such as whether God needs to be able to do the impossible (create a round square, for example) to be perfectly powerful. I have an Orthodox friend who swears up and down that perfect power need only encompass God's actions within the sphere of what is possible (e.g., it is not a hit against God's perfect potency to say that God cannot make a round square, because omnipotence is limited to the set of all possible actions), but a Protestant acquaintance that thinks that God can do the impossible because no limits of human logic apply to God. To make matters worse, I have yet to (myself) come up with a satisfactory definition of evil that is not question-begging or reduced to some sort of naturalist handwaving that "it's evil because it is evil." Certainly I can point to actions that I think are evil (child abuse, for example) but I wonder if I am focusing on the end result without any reference to the motivation or mindset. What about a parent that spansks their child too hard? The parent's motive is discipline, not injury, which ought to make a difference, even though the end result is the same.

Dan'l, I vaguely recall that too. ?It'd be good if we could find the exact quote. ?I want to qualify that thought with the notion that those freewill creatures are still somehow genuinely significant in their choices, that our part in 'what is going to happen anyway' (or 'consenting to be governed by a

King' as David Stockhoff said) really 'makes a difference' somehow. ?However, I'm not sure whether that's Silk's or Wolfe's view. ?Wolfe has kept me guessing on this. ?Sometimes he sounds pretty hard determinist (especially, as I seem to recall, in certain passages of tBotNS). ?Yet the dramas he plays out sound more libertarian. "I know a compatibilist would say that's just how things look but it's all causally determined even if our 'choices' are 'real' based on our desires (which are determined by all that comes before us). ?Is there any room for any kind of libertarian freewill in Wolfe"

The problem of free will is another tough nut because it comes laden with lots of often-unanalyzed presuppositions, such as whether God's foreknowledge entails determination of the result. The same aforementioned friends have divergent views, with one taking the position that God does not need to know everything in order to be omniscient, if, for example, the thing to be known (the result of a coin flip) is a matter of probability rather than certainty. Just because, for example, I do not know the result of a coin toss you wouldn't say that I am unknowledgable about coin tosses, the physics involved, or probability calculations. Even if I told you that given my hand strength, the weight of the coin, and atmospheric conditions the likelihood was greater that I would toss a heads, and I tossed a tails, you would simply say, "well, he knew the probabilities." The other friend, predictably, takes the view that if God knows a thing, because God is atemporal and perceives all events in time simultaneously, God has perfect recollective knowledge of the result of that coin toss. Friend 1 often rejoins that this just makes God the perfect historian rather than an intellective being capable of free thought on his own.

For my own part, being that time is an integral part of my cognition of the world around me, I cannot imagine what an atemporal being would think... and yet my own views on philosophy say that a transcendent being such as God must be unlimited in both space and time, and would not be saddled with the same cognitive requirements for intelligibility that I, a limited creature, am. But because each friend takes different presuppositions as his starting point (one a very continental, Hegelian view of the world, and the other a much more classic Protestant view) they arrive at different answers to these questions. So to answer whether we might freely desire a result set in stone and that be "enough" for free will supposes that "will" equates to our desires, which is itself a loaded proposition: might we not act contrary to our desires, or at some last moment before we take a volitional action, do we always desire to engage in that action?

For my own part, I do not think that the problem of freedom of the will can be answered; how could we ever possibly determine whether our own actions were free or determined, let alone those of others whose psychology is closed to us. We are constrained to act as if our choices are our own, regardless of whether we are autonomous or merely the pawns of divinity.

LH

António Pedro Marques — 13 Apr 2011, 14:55 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Well, Lane, I must say I've seldom if ever seen such a well-wrought presentation of these questions, the more coming from a non-believer (we may discuss that if anyone wishes to). It's so good I'm fully quoting it below fully aware of the sacrifice of electricity.

Lane Haygood wrote (13-04-2011 15:01):

Ok, Lane, right, so Silk's conception of God (the Outsider) is not 'occasionalist' (i.e. God *directly* causes all things), but the fact that God 'permits' evil and forces it to serve his purposes 'however unwillingly' seems to fit in with Aquinas' scheme of primary and secondary causation.

Evil is personified by Silk as *hating* God, yet it is 'harnessed' by God so that it 'serves' him by pointing us who get hurt by evil back to God for our true love and goodness and purpose.

I would say rather that God, as the first cause of all things, is the cause of evil as well as good, and while men are good at identifying little-e evil (the bad things that happen) we are not always good at identifying big-E Evil (the form of Evil, from which all little-e evils are instances), but regardless, all evil/Evil is ultimately part of God's plan. This sounds a lot like the unknown purposes theodicy, with bits of the soul-making thrown around. It's a fairly standard type of theodicy: bad stuff happens but God is God and has some reason for it all.

I think I agree with you that he's arguing that the Outsider allows his creation to 'flow organically', but I just want to point out that Silk is still conceiving of a God very much 'in control' in that his 'permissive will' is orchestrating (if you like) all things towards his desired ends (which, though many are unknown as you point out, yet Silk takes a major known end to be that of love between creature and Creator).

Sure. I didn't mean to make Silk out to be a deist. For Silk's God (and presumably, Wolfe's) desire and control are the same thing; remember, for the problem of evil to have any gravity at all God must be both perfectly powerful and perfectly good. Thus, what God desires, is, and God would not, as perfectly good, desire that which he could not do.

The problem of evil is an interesting logical exercise, but I have never been ultimately convinced of its efficacy (even as a non-believer). It, like the ontological argument, comes laden with value presuppositions that are rarely made explicit, and it is filled with nonsensical logical wrangling such as whether God needs to be able to do the impossible (create a round square, for example) to be perfectly powerful. I have an Orthodox friend who swears up and down that perfect power need only encompass God's actions within the sphere of what is possible (e.g., it is not a hit against God's perfect potency to say that God cannot make a round square, because omnipotence is limited to the set of all possible actions), but a Protestant acquaintance that thinks that God can do the impossible because no limits of human logic apply to God. To make matters worse, I have yet to (myself) come up with a satisfactory definition of evil that is not question-begging or reduced to some sort of naturalist handwaving that "it's evil because it is evil." Certainly I can point to actions that I think are evil (child abuse, for example) but I wonder if I am focusing on the end result without any reference to the motivation or mindset. What about a parent that spans their child too hard? The parent's motive is discipline, not injury, which ought to make a difference, even though the end result is the same.

Dan'l, I vaguely recall that too. It'd be good if we could find the exact quote. I want to qualify that thought with the notion that those freewill creatures are still somehow genuinely significant in their choices, that our part in 'what is going to happen anyway' (or 'consenting to be governed by a King' as David Stockhoff said) really 'makes a difference' somehow. However, I'm not sure whether that's Silk's or Wolfe's view. Wolfe has kept me guessing on this. Sometimes he sounds pretty hard determinist (especially, as I seem to recall, in certain passages of tBotNS). Yet the dramas he plays out sound more libertarian. I know a compatibilist would

say that's just how things look but it's all causally determined even if our 'choices' are 'real' based on our desires (which are determined by all that comes before us). Is there any room for any kind of libertarian freewill in Wolfe?

The problem of free will is another tough nut because it comes laden with lots of often-unanalyzed presuppositions, such as whether God's foreknowledge entails determination of the result. The same aforementioned friends have divergent views, with one taking the position that God does not need to know everything in order to be omniscient, if, for example, the thing to be known (the result of a coin flip) is a matter of probability rather than certainty. Just because, for example, I do not know the result of a coin toss you wouldn't say that I am unknowledgable about coin tosses, the physics involved, or probability calculations. Even if I told you that given my hand strength, the weight of the coin, and atmospheric conditions the likelihood was greater that I would toss a heads, and I tossed a tails, you would simply say, "well, he knew the probabilities." The other friend, predictably, takes the view that if God knows a thing, because God is atemporal and perceives all events in time simultaneously, God has perfect recollective knowledge of the result of that coin toss. Friend 1 often rejoins that this just makes God the perfect historian rather than an intellective being capable of free thought on his own.

For my own part, being that time is an integral part of my cognition of the world around me, I cannot imagine what an atemporal being would think... and yet my own views on philosophy say that a transcendent being such as God must be unlimited in both space and time, and would not be saddled with the same cognitive requirements for intelligibility that I, a limited creature, am. But because each friend takes different presuppositions as his starting point (one a very continental, Hegelian view of the world, and the other a much more classic Protestant view) they arrive at different answers to these questions. So to answer whether we might freely desire a result set in stone and that be "enough" for free will supposes that "will" equates to our desires, which is itself a loaded proposition: might we not act contrary to our desires, or at some last moment before we take a volitional action, do we always desire to engage in that action?

For my own part, I do not think that the problem of freedom of the will can be answered; how could we ever possibly determine whether our own actions were free or determined, let alone those of others whose psychology is closed to us. We are constrained to act as if our choices are our own, regardless of whether we are autonomous or merely the pawns of divinity.

LH

Daniel Petersen — 13 Apr 2011, 16:07 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

I would say rather that God, as the first cause of all things, is the cause of evil as well as good, and while men are good at identifying little-e evil (the bad things that happen) we are not always good at identifying big-E Evil (the form of Evil, from which all little-e evils are instances), but regardless, all evil/Evil is ultimately part of God's plan. This sounds a lot like the unknown

purposes theodicy, with bits of the soul-making thrown around. It's a fairly standard type of theodicy: bad stuff happens but God is God and has some reason for it all.

Well, the only way we could be talking about 'God' in any meaningful sense (perfectly powerful and perfectly good as you later mention) is to carefully qualify this notion of God as 'cause of evil'. He can't *morally* be e/Evil's cause without ceasing to be a 'holy' (morally perfect and just) God. So he must be the 'cause' of evil indirectly through creating freewill creatures with the potential to 'twist away' from him (and Evil is thereby conceived of as 'parasitic' in the Augustinian/Lutheran/Lewisian sense).

There is certainly a 'soul-making' theme in Silk's theodicy, but I wonder if 'loving purpose' would more accurately characterise his argument than 'unknown purpose' (going from Silk's actual words: 'His fear he is afraid for our sake, not his own is that we may come to love other things more than we love him... evil directs us back to the Outsider... because he is better... Reach out to him').

[For convenience to any following along:

<http://silkandhornheresy.blogspot.com/2011/04/silk-takes-stab-at-problem-of-evil.html>]

what God desires, is,

and God would not, as perfectly good, desire that which he could not do.

Hm - 'what God desires, is' - well, not the Hebrew God in any case. The Bible is full of God talking about his desires for his world and how most of the world, including his own chosen people, are living *against*,

*contrary*to what he desires. This is where talk of more than one sort of 'desire' or

'wish' within God comes in I guess. And where concepts like divine 'self-limitation' come in also (so that the notion of his perfect power is preserved even in a world where not all he wishes always comes to pass - not whilst history unfolds anyway). And I really think all that fits with your initial comment about God letting the world 'flow organically' better than what your describing here. It's thorny, I admit, but I suspect Wolfe (and characters like Silk) would want to let divine dynamism force us into inexplicable mystery rather than strict logical tidiness bring us to accept a rather austere static notion of deity. (And of course, mystics and fideists and what have you will always helpfully remind us that at least some important measure of mystery in the face of divinity is hugely rational

- we'd surely be inventing the god we could contain with our intellects!)

It's funny, I (a low-church Protestant) lean toward your Orthodox friend's views rather than your Protestant friend's. I'm guessing the latter is rather Reformed/Calvinist? I'm more classically Arminian myself (though I like to call myself 'Calminian' as I want to stay close to the Calvinist tradition of 'theocentricity' - and Reformed thinkers continue to be helpful to me), so that might partly explain it. As I say, I can't figure out where Wolfe (or his characters) might be on this sort of spectrum.

I have yet to (myself) come up with a satisfactory definition of evil that is not question-begging or reduced to some sort of naturalist handwaving that "it's evil because it is evil."

I appreciate your frankness there. It's hard enough to define (real) evil from a theistic perspective - I just find it nigh on impossible from a naturalistic basis.

So to answer whether we might freely desire a result

set in stone and that be "enough" for free will supposes that "will" equates to our desires, which is itself a loaded proposition: might we not act contrary to our desires, or at some last moment

before we take a volitional action, do we always desire to engage in that action?

I think I'm with you 100% on that formulation of the question. This is the kind of thing I see explored in Wolfe's characters - choices made contrary to desires, etc. - that mitigates against some statements that are potentially determinist/compatibilist. (Although I know there are sophisticated formulations of compatibilism that try to account for this seeming 'choice against desire' - a deeper desire, etc. But I'm not convinced this accounts for what really looks and feels like libertarian choice-making.)

For my own part, I do not think that the problem of freedom of the will can be answered; how could we ever possibly determine whether our own actions were free or determined, let alone those of others whose psychology is closed to us. We are constrained to act as if our choices are our own, regardless of whether we are autonomous or merely the pawns of divinity.

Yes. But I still take that constraint as a huge hint toward the fact that we really are free in some significant sense (ultimately, from my Christian perspective, as *imago Dei* beings). Also: 'autonomous or merely pawns of divinity' - either a false dichotomy or causal reductionism or both. The Christian view wasy we're **dependent** beings (not autonomous) in **relationship** to the divinity. There is real responsibility and real limits to that freedom. We are neither autonomous nor mere pawns. Again, this is the mystery I see throughout Wolfe's writing. Something common to all fiction really. Wolfe's fellow Catholic writer, Flannery O'Connor, deserves to be quoted in this regard:

'Does one's integrity ever lie in what he is not able to do? I think that it usually does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen.' (From her 'Author's Note' to her novel **Wise Blood**.)

It's worth noting too that Silk's God is revelatory, self-disclosing, and this makes ALL the difference. If God speaks to us, then we have an authoritative (though not exhaustively so for our finite minds) voice on these and all other matters he chooses to speak to us about (for our good, on the Christian view, not merely our information or bafflement) - though of course, that voice has to be humbly, wisely interpreted - as you can see in Silk's own musings.

-DOJP

Good talking with you, Lane!

2011/4/13 Ant?nio Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com>

Well, Lane, I must say I've seldom if ever seen such a well-wrought presentation of these questions, the more coming from a non-believer (we may discuss that if anyone wishes to). It's so good I'm fully quoting it below fully aware of the sacrifice of electricity.

Lane Haygood wrote (13-04-2011 15:01):

Ok, Lane, right, so Silk's conception of God (the Outsider) is not 'occasionalist' (i.e. God **directly** causes all things), but the fact that God 'permits' evil and forces it to serve his purposes 'however unwillingly'

seems to fit in with Aquinas' scheme of primary and secondary causation. Evil is personified by Silk as **hating** God, yet it is 'harnessed' by God

so that it 'serves' him by pointing us who get hurt by evil back to God for our true love and goodness and purpose.

I would say rather that God, as the first cause of all things, is the cause of evil as well as good, and while men are good at identifying little-e evil (the bad things that happen) we are not always good at identifying big-E Evil (the form of Evil, from which all little-e evils are instances), but regardless, all evil/Evil is ultimately part of God's plan. This sounds a lot like the unknown purposes theodicy, with bits of the soul-making thrown around. It's a fairly standard type of theodicy: bad stuff happens but God is God and has some reason for it all.

I think I agree with you that he's arguing that the Outsider allows his creation to 'flow organically', but I just want to point out that Silk is still conceiving of a God very much 'in control' in that his 'permissive will' is orchestrating (if you like) all things towards his desired ends (which, though many are unknown as you point out, yet Silk takes a major known end to be that of love between creature and Creator).

Sure. I didn't mean to make Silk out to be a deist. For Silk's God (and presumably, Wolfe's) desire and control are the same thing; remember, for the problem of evil to have any gravity at all God must be both perfectly powerful and perfectly good. Thus, what God desires, is, and God would not, as perfectly good, desire that which he could not do.

The problem of evil is an interesting logical exercise, but I have never been ultimately convinced of its efficacy (even as a non-believer). It, like the ontological argument, comes laden with value presuppositions that are rarely made explicit, and it is filled with nonsensical logical wrangling such as whether God needs to be able to do the impossible (create a round square, for example) to be perfectly powerful. I have an Orthodox friend who swears up and down that perfect power need only encompass God's actions within the sphere of what is possible (e.g., it is not a hit against God's perfect potency to say that God cannot make a round square, because omnipotence is limited to the set of all possible actions), but a Protestant acquaintance that thinks that God can do the impossible because no limits of human logic apply to God. To make matters worse, I have yet to (myself) come up with a satisfactory definition of evil that is not question-begging or reduced to some sort of naturalist handwaving that "it's evil because it is evil." Certainly I can point to actions that I think are evil (child abuse, for example) but I wonder if I am focusing on the end result without any reference to the motivation or mindset. What about a parent that spansks their child too hard? The parent's motive is discipline, not injury, which ought to make a difference, even though the end result is the same.

Dan'l, I vaguely recall that too. It'd be good if we could find the exact quote. I want to qualify that thought with the notion that those freewill creatures are still somehow genuinely significant in their choices, that our part in 'what is going to happen anyway' (or 'consenting to be governed by a King' as David Stockhoff said) really 'makes a difference' somehow. However, I'm not sure whether that's Silk's or Wolfe's view. Wolfe has

kept me guessing on this. Sometimes he sounds pretty hard determinist (especially, as I seem to recall, in certain passages of tBotNS). Yet the dramas he plays out sound more libertarian. I know a compatibilist would say that's just how things look but it's all causally determined even if our 'choices' are 'real' based on our desires (which are determined by all that comes before us). Is there any room for any kind of libertarian freewill in Wolfe?

The problem of free will is another tough nut because it comes laden with lots of often-unanalyzed presuppositions, such as whether God's foreknowledge entails determination of the result. The same aforementioned friends have divergent views, with one taking the position that God does not need to know everything in order to be omniscient, if, for example, the thing to be known (the result of a coin flip) is a matter of probability rather than certainty. Just because, for example, I do not know the result of a coin toss you wouldn't say that I am unknowledgable about coin tosses, the physics involved, or probability calculations. Even if I told you that given my hand strength, the weight of the coin, and atmospheric conditions the likelihood was greater that I would toss a heads, and I tossed a tails, you would simply say, "well, he knew the probabilities." The other friend, predictably, takes the view that if God knows a thing, because God is atemporal and perceives all events in time simultaneously, God has perfect recollective knowledge of the result of that coin toss. Friend 1 often rejoins that this just makes God the perfect historian rather than an intellectual being capable of free thought on his own.

For my own part, being that time is an integral part of my cognition of the world around me, I cannot imagine what an atemporal being would think... and yet my own views on philosophy say that a transcendent being such as God must be unlimited in both space and time, and would not be saddled with the same cognitive requirements for intelligibility that I, a limited creature, am. But because each friend takes different presuppositions as his starting point (one a very continental, Hegelian view of the world, and the other a much more classic Protestant view) they arrive at different answers to these questions. So to answer whether we might freely desire a result set in stone and that be "enough" for free will supposes that "will" equates to our desires, which is itself a loaded proposition: might we not act contrary to our desires, or at some last moment before we take a volitional action, do we always desire to engage in that action?

For my own part, I do not think that the problem of freedom of the will can be answered; how could we ever possibly determine whether our own actions were free or determined, let alone those of others whose psychology is closed to us. We are constrained to act as if our choices are our own, regardless of whether we are autonomous or merely the pawns of divinity.

LH
