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10 Disabled Beatitude

Kevin Timpe

This chapter is an extension of an earlier article, "Defiant Afterlife—Disability and Uniting Ourselves to God." My primary aim there was to push back against a common theological view which holds, even if unreflectively or uncritically, that union with God in the afterlife requires that individuals with disabilities will have those disabilities 'cured' or 'healed' prior to heavenly union with God.[1] To this end, I developed an argument for the possibility of redeemed individuals retaining their disabilities in the eschaton (i.e., in beatitude) and nevertheless enjoying complete union with God (and through God to others). In the present paper, I show not just that it is possible for there to be disability in heaven, but that there are considerations in favor of 'disabled beatitude.'

Methodological Issues

Before I summarize in greater detail my earlier argument for why there could be disabilities in heaven or address the considerations in favor of thinking there will be heavenly disabilities, let me first address three methodological considerations that ought to shape theological or religious philosophical reflection on disability.[2]

First, the present paper is admittedly a part of speculative theology. There are, so far as I can tell, no normative commitments about whether there will be disability in heaven binding on the Christian philosopher, even the Christian philosopher who takes seriously the Christian tradition as an epistemic source for boundaries. None of the first seven ecumenical creeds, for instance, mention disability.[3] And while the boundaries of Catholic theology are not set entirely by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it is interesting that there is no single mention of 'disability' or 'impairment' in such a document which seeks to distill specifically Catholic theology. Similarly, to take another example, neither 'disability' nor 'impairment' is mentioned in any of the three primary Reformed confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—which are described as "revealing the contours of historic Christian teaching from a Reformed perspective" (Billings 2013, 10).

So it looks like Christian theology in general as well as more specific theological accounts of the Christian faith leave open what we ought to think about disability in the eschaton. While I think there are dangers that may arise when doing speculative theology, I don't think those dangers entail that we ought not do it. In fact, I think that the second methodological consideration to which I turn in the next paragraph gives us reason to engage in theological speculation specifically about disability.

Second, our theological vision can shape our communal practices. This certainly happens with official dogmatic theology, as when Catholics participate at least weekly in the Mass because

> the Church obliges the faithful to take part in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and feast days and, prepared by the sacrament of Reconciliation, to receive the Eucharist at least once a year, if possible during the Easter season. But the Church strongly encourages the faithful to receive the holy Eucharist on Sundays and feast days, or more often still, even daily.
>
> (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2003, section 1389)

This isn't, of course, to say that such admonishments are always followed. One could fail to have one's practices reflect the theology that one confesses. The present point is simply that one's official theology often does, and should, shape one's practices. And what is true of dogmatic theology can also be true of speculative theology. Much American evangelical theology is shaped by speculative commitments regarding eschatology in ways that, for instance, lead them to be less likely to recycle than are other parts of the American public.[4]

My earlier paper is part of a growing literature which shows how theological beliefs about disability shape the Church's behavior toward those with disabilities, often with the result of excluding them from full participation in the Church. There I mention, for example, how John Calvin's views about both disability and the Eucharist led him to exclude individuals with cognitive disabilities from participating in the Eucharist. For Calvin, the Christian life "cannot be said to be well ordered and regulated unless in it the Holy Supper of our Lord is always being celebrated and frequented" (Calvin 1954, 48). As we'll see below, Calvin thought that individuals with cognitive disabilities are prohibited from the Eucharistic table, and thus seem excluded from 'the well ordered and regulated' Christian life. The past few decades have seen numerous scholars further explore how misguided views about the nature of disability and the value of lives with disabilities have negatively shaped Christian practices (Yong 2011; Hull 2014; Clifton 2018; Eiesland 1994; Ben Conner 2012; Wilder 2016; Reinders 2008; Swinton 2012; Brock forthcoming). In one of the influential books in this area, *The Disabled God*, theologian Nancy Eiesland explores how the history of excluding individuals with

disabilities from the Church is often the result of theological reflection on disability:

> Three themes—sin and disability conflation, virtuous suffering, and segregationist charity—illustrate the theological obstacles encountered by people with disabilities who seek inclusion and justice within the Christian community. It cannot be denied that the biblical record and Christian theology have often been dangerous for persons with disabilities.
>
> (Eiesland 1994, 74)

Elsewhere, I've discussed some of the ways that problematic assumptions about the nature of disability have led the Church to mistreat individuals with disabilities both in the past and in the present (Timpe 2018).

Furthermore, Christian life is communal (see, e.g., Wolterstorff 2018; Cuneo 2016; Smith 2016), which connects with the third methodological consideration I want to mention. I think it's important to keep in mind that theology and disability are inherently social. That theology is an inherently social or communal enterprise ought to be obvious. But beyond just the communal nature of theological inquiry, Christian communities live out their theology in social ways. For instance, it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer's view of the social nature of Christian life that led him to support the Bethel community and structure his *Life Together* (Bonhoeffer 1954; see also Wannenwetsch 2012). Disability is also communal, both in terms of some of its causes and effects (Timpe 2019). The social nature of disability is also closely connected with social models of disability, including the influential recent Value-Neutral Model defended by Elizabeth Barnes (Barnes 2016, especially ch. 3).[5] Unlike other proponents of social models of disability, Barnes doesn't endorse the impairment/disability distinction that is often associated with the social model of disability. According to this distinction, while impairment is physical (i.e., biological or physiological), disability is "something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group" (Barnes 2012, 14).[6] Barnes rejects this distinction, in part because it pushes the question of 'what is disability?' back into the question of 'what is impairment?' She instead just talks about disability, which in her view still has an inherently social dimension. Eyler also calls into question the distinction as problematic: "The social model has a long life in Disability Studies research, but some scholars have questioned its effectiveness, primarily because the model forces the binary opposition of 'impairment' and 'disability' in ways that at times seems rather misleading" (Eyler 2010, 5). Shelley Lynn Tremain argues in a different direction that impairment itself is socially constructed, and thus argues against the traditional social model of disability built on the disability/impairment distinction (Tremain 2017).

While the details differ, those views that reject strongly individualist medical models of disability insist that there's a central social element to being disabled.

Making Space for Disability in the Eschaton

My earlier "Defiant Afterlife—Disability and Uniting Ourselves to God" sought to do three things.[7] It begins by briefly surveying how Christian theological reflection on disability has eschatological implications for individuals with disabilities. It then explores a number of recent treatments of the relationship between disability and eschatology, criticizing those extant accounts. The paper culminates in an argument for the possibility that at least some disabilities can be retained in the afterlife in a way that doesn't detract from the beatific vision[8] of the redeemed.

Given that the majority of disabilities are acquired rather than congenital, I don't think that all disabilities are essential to the personal identity of those who have them. Just as there are individuals who come to acquire a disability in a way that doesn't threaten their identity, so too it is possible for some individuals to cease to have a disability in a way that doesn't threaten their personal identity. However, I think we have good reason to think that many of the accidental or contingent features of our identities are such that we'll keep them in the eschaton. There are aspects of our identities that, even though not essential to us, will remain as part of who we are into the afterlife. Even if it's literally true that in heaven people 'will neither marry nor be given in marriage,' it will still be the case that my identity is shaped by the contingent experiences that are part of my ongoing relationship with my spouse. Furthermore, while being a parent is only a contingent part of my identity, stripping me of the relationship I have with my children in the afterlife would involve a needless, damaging, and perhaps even unjust change to my identity. So too with some disabilities.

Whether a person retains a disability in the resurrection or not, I think, depends on whether it involves what Barnes calls 'bad-difference' or 'mere-difference.' Those views which hold that "disability is by itself something that makes you worse off [are] 'bad-difference' views of disability" (Barnes 2016, 55; while she sometimes refers to *the* bad-difference view and *the* mere-difference view, each should be understood as a family of views, much as the problem of evil is really a family of related problems) while mere-difference views are those according to which having a disability doesn't by itself or automatically make you worse off. This way of drawing the contrast, she notes, is "rough-and-ready" (Barnes 2016, 55) for her purposes, but it should be sufficient for present purposes as well. Furthermore, the connection between the disability and the difference in well-being is important for differentiating bad-difference from mere-difference disabilities. It is consistent with a rejection of a

bad-difference view that individuals with disabilities are in fact worse off than non-disabled individuals, insofar as that difference was caused by social structures or ableism. Furthermore, there can be bad effects of disabilities that would still exist in the absence of ableism. But those same disabilities might allow for other goods that are perhaps unique to or even just more common for those with the disability. So the question is whether the effects caused by disability are net-negative in that they are "counterfactually stable—disability would have such effect even in the absence of ableism" (Barnes 2016, 60).

I grant that if there are any disabilities that involve bad-difference or would interfere with a person's complete union with God, then Christian conceptions of heaven are such that those disabilities will not be present there given the nature of heavenly beatitude.[9] But these disabilities would be removed prior to the eschaton not *just* because a disability is present *simpliciter*, but rather because the specific disability prevents the perfection of the union with God characteristic of the beatific vision. For any disability that does not involve bad-difference or which does not intrinsically interfere with union with God, then that particular reason why it could not be present in heaven is absent.[10] On the view I've developed, there may be some disabilities that can be retained in the afterlife in a way that doesn't impair the beatific vision, even if there are others that may not have a place in our eschatology because they detract from a person's flourishing.[11] And I sought to give a number of examples that plausibly could be understood in this way. I concluded "Defiant Afterlife" by saying that we need not think, as Augustine does, that there is a problem with individuals being such that they "shall rise again in their deformity, and not rather with an amended and perfected body" (Augustine, *Enchiridion*, ch. 87: "The Case of Monstrous Births").

Extending the Account

It's one thing to say that some disabilities *could be* present in the beatific vision. It's quite another to say that we have reason to think that some disabilities *will be* eschatologically present. The present section seeks to give some admittedly speculative reasons to think that there will be some disabilities in heaven.

Incarnational Reasons

I begin with a few arguments that there will be disability in the eschaton that draw on the Incarnation that I think fail. Some theologians of disability argue that the resurrected Christ himself was disabled, thereby establishing the possibility of eschatological disability.[12] Nancy Eiesland's influential *The Disabled God*, mentioned earlier, is perhaps the best

example. Speaking of Jesus's post-resurrection appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem recounted in Luke 24, Eiesland writes:

> Here is the resurrected Christ making good on the incarnational proclamation that God would be with us, embodied as we are, incorporating the fullness of human contingency and ordinary life into God. In presenting his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends, the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the disabled God. . . . The disabled God is not only the One from heaven but the revelation of true personhood, underscoring the reality that full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability.
>
> (Eiesland 1994, 100)

Here Eiesland thinks of Jesus as having impaired hands and feet from the crucifixion, as well as a disfigured side. But she doesn't specify what the disability is that God has.[13] She appears to endorse the impairment/disability distinction, discussed in the previous section, that is at the core of the social model of disability. In chapter 1 of *The Disabled God*, she allows that someone could have an impairment and not be disabled if they haven't been "single[d] out for differential treatment" or "shaped primarily by exclusion" (Eiesland 1994, 24). Presumably the impairment involved in the post-crucified Jesus would be loss of functioning that results from the damage to his hands (and feet and side) caused by the nails. And then presumably Jesus would be disabled in virtue of the differential treatment and exclusion resulting from the crucifixion. But it's not clear that the resurrected Christ actually does have a loss of functioning from the wounds imposed by the crucifixion; after the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus is able to break bread (Luke 24:30), walk (Luke 24:15), and cook fish and eat (Luke 21:9). So what is the relevant impairment that remains after the wounds are healed? It's not clear. And remember that on Eiesland's view even if an impairment can be specified, having an impairment is not sufficient for having a disability.[14] Will the Incarnate Christ be singled out for differential treatment or shaped primarily by exclusion in the eschaton? Presumably not.

Theologian Amos Yong doesn't endorse explicitly Eiesland's line of thinking in his recent book *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*. As with his earlier *Theology and Down Syndrome*, Yong thinks that continuity of identity between the pre- and post-mortem life requires some disabilities to be present in the afterlife.[15] He also holds that rejecting heavenly disability would contribute to normate biases[16] that undervalue lives with disabilities:

> If there are no disabilities in the life to come, then that implicitly suggests that our present task is to rid the world of such unfortunate and unwanted realities. . . . If disability is a reflection of the present,

fallen, and broken order of things, the redemption of this world and its transformation into the coming eon will involve the removal of all symptoms related to the tragic character of life dominated by sin [including disability].

(Yong 2011, 118ff.)

If creaturely disability in heaven would counter such normate biases, even more so would a disability assumed or acquired in the Incarnation. Yong doesn't explicitly make this point. But he does make the weaker claim that the second person of the Trinity fully enters into the experience of disability in the Incarnation. According to Yong,

> Jesus need not have qualified for a disability license plate in order to enter into the existence of people with disabilities because, as I have been arguing throughout this volume, disability is not only an individualized, biological/medical experience but also a social phenomenon of oppression, marginalization, and exclusion. According to this definition, Jesus entered into the experience of disability fully in his suffering, persecution, and the execution at the hands of others. Thus, he is able to identify with people who have disabilities as one who has shared their ostracism 'in every respect.'
>
> (Yong 2011, 126)

And while Yong doesn't go so far as to say that because of the scars, Jesus has a disability or even an impairment, he does argue that they indicate the importance of "the continuities between the historical and eschatological bodies" (Yong 2011, 129) which, he thinks, gives us reason to think that we'll have the same continuity in our eschatological bodies. But all that requires is the marks or consequences of and not the disabilities themselves; and the same could be true of Jesus.[17]

Social Reasons

There are social reasons that, while I don't think they are decisive, give us some reason to think that there will be disabilities in heaven.[18] First, consider the roles that disability identity and disability pride can play in a person's life in the present life. Many people's experiences and life-projects get folded into their self-understanding and identities in such a way that, barring reasons for thinking they can't be part of one's heavenly identity, we might think will be retained. If these experiences and life-projects are not only good (as I think often is the case with respect to disability identity and disability advocacy) but also part of their lived love for God, then these goods could be folded into the goods found in heaven. Suppose, for instance, that so long as a desire isn't mis-ordered, it is good for us to get "the desires of our heart" (Stump 2010). If retaining

their disability as part of their self-understanding or self-identity is among the desires of a person's heart, then perhaps God has a reason to retain a person's disabilities as part of God's act of loving them. Furthermore, these goods need not just attach to the good for the individual with the disability. Many social practices can connect individuals without disabilities (or with other disabilities) to an individual in such a way that matters for the common and not just individual good, as evidenced by the *L'Arche* communities. Disability pride, for instance, can motivate advocacy work aimed at justice and can strengthen the union and solidarity that people have with disabled individuals.

While I think that there's something important about these social reasons, the issues surrounding both proper pride and solidarity are complex. I think there are two less complicated lines of argument for the claim that there will, in fact, be disability in heaven. The first of these has to do with specific features of particular disabilities. The second has to do with those features of creation that make possible disability. I consider each of these in turn.

Specific Disabilities

My work on disability is shaped by what Manuel Vargas calls "the standard of naturalistic plausibility":

> on a standard of naturalistic plausibility the account requires something that speaks in its favor beyond mere coherence with the known facts. . . . We seek a theory that has something to be said for it, in light of what we know about the natural world.
>
> (Vargas 2013, 58)

My work on disabilities aims to satisfy what I refer to as the Principle of Minimal Agential Realism, which is structured on Vargas's standard of naturalistic plausibility:

> Make sure, when constructing a theory of agency, that the kinds of powers, capacities, and outputs posited by that theory could, for all we know, be had by us.[19]

To see how a particular disability might contribute to the good of the agent or community in the eschaton, consider the case of Williams syndrome. Williams syndrome is caused by a deletion on the long arm of chromosome 7 (more specifically, it's a deletion in 7q11.23). Individuals with Williams syndrome typically have a number of physical features, including a characteristic facial appearance; heart or blood vessel problems, such as supravalvular aortic stenosis; hypercalcemia (elevated blood calcium levels); and joint laxity or joint stiffness. While some of

these conditions can be problematic (e.g., hypercalcemia can cause pain and interfere with the heart's functioning), their associated risks would presumably be absent from the resurrected body.

But consider instead some of the social and emotional effects of Williams syndrome, which plausibly are not problematic. Many individuals with Williams syndrome exhibit a unique range of social and interpersonal characteristics, including:

- unique intensity and duration of attention to people
- hypersociability
- heightened intensity of social interaction
- strength in interpreting non-verbal behavior
- excessive friendliness to others, including strangers
- higher than normal degrees of empathy and emotional sensitivity (Niccols 2012; Mervis et al. 2003; Morris 2000; Filder et al. 2007. In addition, some evidence suggests a similar strength in young children with Down syndrome; see Fidler 2005; Kasari 1995)

These characteristics can lead to increased motivation for interpersonal interaction and closeness.

Fidler et al. refer to the "complementary aspect of primary *intersubjectivity* (i.e., the ability to respond in synchronous ways to other people's emotional displays" as "emotional responsivity" (Fidler 2007, 194). The relative likelihood, defined as the ratio of proportions of individuals displaying the characteristic in question between groups, of positive interpersonal affective social behaviors ranged from 1.4 to 14.3 in favor of those with Williams syndrome, leading the researchers to conclude that children with Williams syndrome have increased performance with regard to emotional responsivity toward others (Fidler 2007; interestingly, this increase "did not seem to translate into improved performance in other areas of social functioning, in particular social decision-making" [202; see also 204]). Another study found that children with Williams syndrome are also more likely to seek interaction with other persons rather than with inanimate objects than are children without the condition (Mervis et al. 2003, 263). While the above two studies focused on toddlers with Williams syndrome, the cluster of interpersonal characteristics has been found to a significantly greater extent among individuals with Williams syndrome than any comparison group, and this "evidence regarding this profile has been obtained primarily from older children, adolescents, and adults" (Mervis 2003, 245).

Some researchers suggest that there can be a cost to the heightened social interaction and interpersonal focus characteristic of Williams syndrome which can be detrimental in certain situations that require attention to non-routine surroundings. In these cases, the hypersociality and increased focus on persons rather than other environmental features

can "significantly reduce their opportunities to learn about the world" (Mervis 2003, 263). But these constraints need not be present in the afterlife, given the perfected nature of heaven (see the discussions in Timpe 2019; Pawl and Timpe 2009; Pawl and Timpe 2017). It's not the case, for instance, that one will run the risk of tripping and falling in heaven because one is too busy talking with Saint Cecilia and not paying enough attention to one's peripatetic environment.

Or consider 'hyperfocusing,' the (relative) inability to shift attention from particular preferred or agent-engaging tasks to other activities that is clinically well-known in both Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (see Ozel 2014; regarding ASD, there's reason to think that it isn't a unified condition but rather a cluster of conditions related by "family resemblance" [Cushing 2013, 22]; see also McGuire 2016, 21). Research suggests a link between hyperfocusing and the tendency among autistics[20] and persons with ADHD to perseverate; hyperfocus is also connected with the reasons that autistics participate in stimming (i.e., repetitive self-stimulatory or stereotypic behaviors). Hyperfocus, perseveration, and stimming have all been linked to executive function impairments in individuals with ASD (Lopez 2005; Ridley 1994; Turner 1997)[21] and ADHD (Corbett 2009). While the etiology of autism isn't known (Firth 2008), many researchers think that executive function deficits are only part of the etiology of ADHD (Corbett 2009). There is a very high comorbidity between having ASD and ADHD, though the degree of comorbidity ranges greatly by study, varying from 37% to 85% (see Leitner 2014 for a discussion). Even apart from the comorbidity, there are a variety of reasons to see common behavioral features between individuals with ASD and those with ADHD.[22]

Joseph Straus suggests that hyperfocus among autistics plays a positive role in autistic culture and, were it not for social conventions that dispose people against stereotypically autistic behaviors, could positively contribute to even wider-ranging communities (Straus 2013). Similarly, Jami Anderson recounts the story of Virginia Bovell, the mother of an autistic son, who thinks that autism gives her son "a kind of rapture. . . [and] access to a kind of rapture" that neurotypical people do not have access to (as quoted in Anderson 2013, 129). While the exact nature of the union with God in the beatific vision is contestable (see Van Dyke 2014), it will involve as a central element awareness of and union with God. A frequent objection to the possibility of an endless post-mortem paradisiacal state involving beatitude is that such a state would eventually become boring, or dull (Williams 1973; Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin 2014; Kagan 2012, ch. 11; Riberiro 2011; Bortolotti and Nagasawa 2009). While I'm inclined to think that the boringness worry can be avoided in other ways (Pawl and Timpe 2017; Silverman 2017), note that the greater one's ability to hyperfocus the

less bite the boringness worry has. And even if the ability to hyperfocus isn't required for beatitude without risk of ennui or tedium, having such an ability would provide another way to secure a good that is at the heart of beatitude, and thus would contribute to the perfection of such a state.[23]

Though his focus is on how certain traits that often accompany autism, including hyperfocus, can be strengths for leadership within congregates, Grant Macaskill develops a line of argument that could support my own. Macaskill argues that autistics have goods to offer religious communities that could benefit from their leadership. Some of these goods are at least in part a function of their being autistic:

> our perception of leadership qualities is often based on natural properties of commodity or capital (perceived 'wisdom') that are effectively negated by Paul at the beginning of 1 Corinthians. Reflecting on the place that those with ASD might have in leadership invites us to reflect on whether we are drawn to those who possess a certain set of natural qualities or personality traits and whether our values are, in fact, subconsciously biased toward normality. The possibility that we overlook the capacity that those with ASD may have for leadership because they may lack such qualities is one that we must consider. . . . Properly considered, however, churches can value the unique insights and strengths of those with ASD and, in the process, can reflect upon their own residual biases.
>
> (Macaskill 2018, 32f. and 37)

Suppose that Macaskill is correct. Given the nature of the one body that is the Church, holding that none of the gifts that contribute to the goodness of local congregations could contribute to the goodness of the perfected Church in the eschaton is an instance of the normate biases that disability theologians like Yong argue we need to reject in our theology. Along these lines, theologian Benjamin Conner argues that Deaf Gain can contribute not just to communicative strategies, but to the fullness of the body of Christ (Conner 2018, ch. 3).

Some individuals in the neurodiversity movement make claims that can be seen as supporting the case for disabled beatitude. Drawing on the neurodiversity movement and with an eye toward the neurological underpinnings of the characteristics under discussion, Jami Anderson suggests that

> rather than regarding autistic neurological structures as 'defective' or 'disordered,' one should regard autistic neurology as worth valuing because each neurological structure contributes to the collective variety of human neurological diversity, in much the same way that each culture contributes to cultural diversity and each of the hundreds of

human languages makes a valuable contribution to human linguistic diversity.

(Anderson 2013, 127)

Anderson also suggests that the superior memory, a common splinter trait, that many autistic individuals have is "advantageous and highly valuable" (Anderson 2013, 131 note 7). While Anderson doesn't have eschatological beatitude in mind here, her point could be applied to this new context as well.[24] And similar considerations could be made for other claims about neurodiversity.

Admittedly, the disabilities discussed here are neither necessary nor sufficient for the characteristics related to those conditions that I've suggested could contribute to the beatific vision. Williams syndrome is neither necessary nor sufficient for the heightened social interaction and interpersonal focus characteristic of that condition. Neither autism nor ADHD are either necessary or sufficient for the ability to hyperfocus on particular tasks. But one need not think that a characteristic is necessary or sufficient for a good in order to think that the characteristic in question could contribute positively to the beatific vision. Being married sometimes helps individuals understand the importance of personal contribution to the good of a larger social group, but it's surely neither necessary nor sufficient for such a realization. Singing songs of praise is neither necessary nor sufficient for worship. Nevertheless, surely the history of having been married to another can contribute to that part of the realization of the social nature of the goods involved in the beatific vision, just as singing songs of praise can contribute to beatified corporate worship as part of our perfection union with God.

So there may be goods related to disability that positively contribute to the beatified state. In light of the history of undervaluing the lives of individuals with disabilities, it's important to note there that the positive justification for beatified disability is a good that goes to the individual with that disability. If the good from the disability in heaven benefits the community, it should do so by either being neutral or positive for the individual. The good here then isn't merely communal or other-focused. Richard Swinburne has argued that in some cases it is the 'good of being of use' that justifies another person's suffering:

> Now note another great good—the good of our life serving a purpose, of being of use to ourselves and others. . . . Just as it is a great good freely to choose to do good, so it is also a good to be used by someone else for a worthy purpose (so long, that is, that he or she has the right, the authority, to use us in this way). Being allowed to suffer to make possible a great good is a privilege, even if the privilege is forced on you.

(Swinburne 1996, 101f.; see also Swinburne 2004, 259–262)

As Swinburne later clarifies, God has the right to allow an individual to suffer even if the suffering doesn't benefit the individual, so long as their life is overall good (Swinburne 1999, 235; for a dissenting view see Stump 2010). On Swinburne's view, it is not unjust for God to use an individual's suffering instrumentally for the good of others without her consent in a way that justifies it. Given this, Swinburne would surely agree that if there is a heavenly good contributed by a disability, it need not be a good for the individual.[25] But not so on my view. There is data that suggests that communities do, in fact, experience goods from the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. There's evidence, for instance siblings of individuals with Down Syndrome show more empathy and a higher degree of caregiving behaviors than do siblings of typically developed children (Feniger-Schaal 2012, 340). Nevertheless, as Aaron Cobb and I have argued, the good that justified an evil of being the goods that could justify a bad-different disability (if such there are) shouldn't be understood as merely communal goods (such as 'the good of being of use'). Our view requires that the good involved is good for the individual, even if it also a good for the community (see Cobb and Timpe 2017).

General Conditions That Make Disability Possible

The previous section considered potential heavenly goods that could come from specific disabilities. But there may yet be other goods that are served not by the disabilities themselves, but by the conditions that make disability possible. To see the difference here, consider Michael Murray's work on the problem of divine hiddenness. Murray distinguishes between two kinds of theodicies:

> There are two distinct species of free-will theodicies. . . . The first type of free-will theodicy argues that one of the consequences of endowing creatures with free-will is that these beings have the option to choose evil over good. As a result, it is impossible that God actualize a world such that there are both free beings and also no possibility of those beings undertaking evil actions. I call theodicies of this type *consequent free-will theodicies*. They are 'consequent' in the sense that evil is to be accounted for in terms of the conditions that arise as a consequence of the existence of free-will in our world.

(Murray 2009, 284)

While most free-will theodicies are of this sort, Murray's response to the problem of divine hiddenness takes another form:

> The theodicy that is important here argues that there are certain *antecedent* conditions that must necessarily hold or fail to hold if beings endowed with freedom are to be able to exercise this freedom in a

morally significant manner. . . . This argument strategy thus contends that certain antecedent conditions must obtain if free creatures are to be able to exercise their freedom in the most robust sense. And since there is good reason for creating creatures who can exercise their freedom in this fashion, there is good reason to create the necessary antecedent conditions which would allow for such exercising of freedom.

(Murray 2009, 284)

I'm not presently seeking to give a theodicy, much less a free-will theodicy. Given that I don't think that all disabilities are bad-differences, I don't think that their existence demands a theodicy.[26] Rather, it's the distinction between *consequent* and *antecedent* approaches that is of interest here. Notice that the potential goods of beatified disability in the previous section are consequent goods. Now I want to suggest that there may also be antecedent goods that also contribute to thinking that among the heavenly goods are beatified disabilities.

To see what I have in mind, consider the general features of creation that make at least some kinds of disability, namely congenital disabilities, possible.[27] The diversity and variation within life is best explained by an evolutionary account involving genetic mutation via sexual reproduction. Genetic variation made possible by mutation and natural selection gives rise to new forms, and thus the diversity, of life. If sexual reproduction with genetic variation due to mutation is, indeed, the correct explanation for biodiversity, then presumably God had a reason or reasons for creating according to such a process. As theologian John Haught argues, we have reason to think that the biological processes that allow for the emergence and evolution of life "are woven everlastingly into the kingdom of heaven" (Haught 2010, 53; see also Collins 2009). This evolutionary drama, he continues, "consists, at the very minimum, of the intensification of creation's beauty, a beauty that, to Christian faith, is everlastingly sustained and patterned anew within the life of God" (Haught 2010, 72). One need not agree with the details of Haught's account, of course, to think that the general claim that there is good reason for God to have created via an evolutionary account involving genetic mutation (see De Smedt and De Cruz forthcoming, especially ch. 2). It's precisely this way of understanding life that gives us reason to think that disability is an inherent part of actual human embodiment.[28] And if there is good reason for creating according to that process, there is good reason to create the necessary antecedent conditions that would allow for disabilities that are the result of genetic mutation (e.g., Williams syndrome or 2p15-16.1 microdeletion syndrome). Theologian Shane Clifton makes clear that while "God could have created things differently, setting up a universe without pain, suffering, and death, and without disability," had God created in such a way it would be a creation

without many of the goods that the world actually involves (Clifton 2018, 39).

Conclusion

Many people might be surprised to think that there could be disability in the eschaton. But remember that many of the medievals thought they needed to defend the presence of females in heaven. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, considered it necessary to argue against those who "hold that among the bodies of the risen the feminine sex will be absent" (SCG IV, 88.1). In response, Aquinas asserts that

the [purported] frailty of the feminine sex is not in opposition to the perfection of the risen. For this frailty is not due to a shortcoming of nature, but to an intention of nature. And this very distinction of nature among human beings will point out the perfection of nature and the divine wisdom as well, which disposes all things in a certain order.

(SCG IV, 88.3)

Aquinas's point about the distinction between the sexes in human nature[29] can also be seen as applying to the diversity of the sexes, which serves the antecedent reasons considered above.[30] And then, by reasons parallel to Aquinas's reasoning about sex, one can think that the possibility of disability isn't due to a shortcoming of human nature, but rather a reflection of human nature as created by divine wisdom, which disposes all things in a certain order—namely beatitude. Those who think that no disability could contribute to beatitude in this way seem to understand all disabilities as involving bad-differences. And if one thinks that they are, we're back to the normate biases that we have good reason to reject.

While there may be certain goods that particular disabilities rule out, they don't always rule them out as uniformly as we may think. As Campbell and Stramondo point out,

these features are multiply realizable, and most disabilities cut off only certain avenues for achieving such goods. The blind person may not be able to enjoy the paintings of Monet, but she can certainly appreciate beauty through the work of Tolstoy and Chopin. The paraplegic can always take a casual roll though the park and can engage in a range of competitive athletic events.

(Campbell and Stramondo 2017, 157)

Furthermore, there is reason to think that the entire range of abilities isn't needed for perfect happiness. Do humans have to be sensitive to all wavelengths of light in order to be able to achieve beatitude? Do they also need to be able to have those aesthetic experiences that involve sonar or

radar? We need not answer these questions in the affirmative. If human beatitude required our enjoyment of all goods, it would require rejecting human finitude. As Campbell and Stramondo write,

> since we do not judge the lives of nondisabled people to be impoverished when they fail to partake in every means of attaining every good in life, it is inconsistent and unreasonable to make a similar judgement about the lives of disabled people.
>
> (Campbell and Stramondo 2017, 158; see also Silvers 2003, 479 and Amundson 2005)

Speaking of the good that is her son Jack's life, Hillary Yancey makes clear that we don't need to think of lives with disability as good only despite the disability: "I can't believe God is a God who makes that gift [a human life, Jack] good *despite* its difference. God makes it good *because* of them, *in the midst* of them. God makes that life good" (Yancey 2018, 146f.). And the perfection of the human good is made perfect in the beatific vision.[31]

Notes

1. My work on disability in philosophy of religion has much in common with that of theologian Amos Yong, who has a similar motivation. While I disagree with Yong on various details, I share with him the desire to articulate an 'eschatological vision' which affords disability a place in humans' perfected union with God in the beatific vision (Yong 2007, 266).
2. The religious tradition I'll be working from is the Christian tradition. This is perhaps non-ideal for a volume that seeks to 'broaden the boundaries' of contemporary philosophy of religion, given that contemporary philosophy of religion in the English-speaking world predominately works with and very often simply assumes a Christian theology. Nevertheless, that is the tradition both that I am most familiar with and with which I identify. And so I'll work within it. It seems to me, however, that much and perhaps even most of what I say here could be endorsed by those working with the Islamic tradition, as well as by those working within those forms of Judaism that affirm the bodily resurrection.
3. For a discussion of the specific role of the earliest seven ecumenical creeds and why they are authoritative in the Christian tradition, see Pawl 2016, particularly ch. 1.
4. See Barna's study here: www.barna.com/research/a-new-generation-of-adults-bends-moral-and-sexual-rules-to-their-liking/. In 2013 megachurch pastor Mark Driscoll indicated no need to care for the environment since "I know who made the environment and he's coming back and going to burn it all up." Contrast this with the view of ecology promoted by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*.
5. Here is Barnes on the social model:

    > According to the social model, disability is the disadvantage produced by social prejudice against certain types of persons (persons with impairments). . . .

> Disability *just is* the negative net effects of having an impairment in a society that discriminates against those with impairments.
>
> (Barnes 2016, 25)

And disability Tom Shakespeare argues there's no agreement on what the social model actually is; see Shakespeare 2018.

6. This social model of disability, and the underlying impairment/disability distinction on which it draws, was originally advocated by UPIAS (the Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation) in 1976. It has become extremely influential, both academically and politically. It is now codified, for instance, in the World Health Organization's *International Classification of Impairment, Disability, and Handicap*.
7. For a suggestion that disability could have been present in the Garden of Eden as well as in heaven, see Cooreman-Guittin 2018.
8. The phrase 'beatific vision' obviously has sighted overtones that could be seen to be ableist. While recognizing this, given the historical use of the phrase I'll continue to use it, but making it explicit here that 'vision' may be used metaphorically and may not require the sense of sight.
9. I think this conditional is relatively uncontroversial. What is more controversial, however, is whether the antecedent is ever fulfilled. I've argued in a number of places that not all disabilities involve bad-difference, nor do all disabilities mean that the person who has them fall below the relevant limit such that simply in virtue of having that disability their union with God is impaired. But I am open to this being the case for some disabilities; see Timpe and Cobb 2017; Timpe forthcoming-b.
10. If there are disabilities that accidentally interfere with one's union with God, then presumably the feature that leads to that accidental feature would be removed. For instance, if there is a disability that in some cases leads to one's community interfering with one's union with God, as is plausibly the case many times for autistics, then one's community could be perfected so that it no longer has that impact.
11. Given that I don't think there is a single thing that *is* disability, I'm completely comfortable with thinking that different disabilities need to be treated in different ways in our philosophical and theological accounts, including our accounts of heaven. See Timpe forthcoming-a.
12. Richard Cross argues that the incarnate Christ, both pre- and post-resurrection, is impaired, though not disabled. Cross differentiates between impairment and disability as follows:

    > impairment is dependence; disability is the failure of the environment— be it the physical environment or the activities of other human agents— to provide the conditions for provide [*sic*] for opportunities for dependence necessary for flourishing. So, strictly speaking, human persons are intrinsically impaired, but not disabled.
    >
    > (Cross 2011, 657 note 28; see also 650)

13. There's also a trinitarian worry here for Eiesland's view. Even if it's true that the Incarnate Christ is disabled, it doesn't follow that God is disabled, given that not everything that is true of the Incarnate Christ in virtue of being true of his human nature is also true of the divine nature. See Pawl 2016.
14. For a related discussion of the marks of disability, specifically those caused by martyrdom, see Williams 2018, particularly 4f. For other criticisms of Eiesland's view, see Monteith 2005, 66f. and Creamer 2004, 260f. It may be

that we're identified by the marks of impairment, such as scars from crucifixion or martyrdom, without having the impairments in question themselves.

15. It's sometimes unclear what sense of 'identity' Yong has in mind. For my evaluation of Yong's argument on this point, see Timpe 2020.

16. Yong describes normate biases as "the unexamined prejudices that non-disabled people have toward disability and toward people who have them" (Yong 2011, 10). So understood, normate biases are closely related to ableism, as Yong himself notes (Yong 2011, 11f.). See also Scuro 2017; Goodley 2014.

17. In Timpe 2020, I discuss how Yong's view involves "retain[ing] their phenotypical features in their resurrection body" (Yong 2007, 282) but that doesn't entail retaining the disability itself; see especially section 3.2. Yong also calls for a "disability-informed theological anthropology. . . [in which] people with disabilities are . . . accepted, included, and valued members of the human family regardless of how they measure up to our economic, social, and political conventions" (Yong 2011, 180, 182). And taking the incarnation seriously, even if that doesn't mean attributing disability to the incarnate Christ, contributes to such an anthropology.

18. I'm grateful to Robin Dembroff, Hilary Yancey, and Mike Rea for getting me to think about these social reasons.

19. The Principle of Minimal Agential Realism is structured parallel to Owen Flanagan's "Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism," in Flanagan 1991, 34. See Timpe 2019, 18.

20. The vast majority of autistics prefer identity-first language to person-first language. See also McGuire 2016, ch. 5.

21. However, the executive function profile associated with ASD and that associated with ADHD differ, even if the two conditions have some similarities in terms of behavior; these differences suggest distinct executive function profiles.

22. For a summary of the modeling, biological pathways, and neuroanatomical correlates, see Corbett 2009. Corbett et al. suggest that individuals with both ASD and ADHD "may represent a distinct phenotype in autism that requires further study" (218).

23. I must also admit that it's not obvious that all of the executive function issues involved with ASD would have the positive impact in the afterlife that I'm considering here.

24. For another discussion of how disability can contribute to the goodness of the Church, see Yong 2011, 94f.

25. While Swinburne might allow for extrinsic goods to come from disability, he would deny the claim that there is an intrinsic good that comes from a disability.

26. What may be required is a theodicy for the social and personal harms that humans cause those with disabilities to suffer, but those could presumably be addressed with one's standard responses to the problem of moral evils.

27. I focus on human disability even though there is also disability, both acquired and congenital, among non-human animals. Insofar as I'm inclined toward a version of animalism, according to which humans are a particular kind of animal (and essentially so), I see the prevalence of disability across the spectrum of animals to reinforce the points I make here.

28. There are two ways I see this line of argumentation being resisted. First, one might think that since disability involves bad-difference, pre-fall human bodies could not have had disabilities as originally created. This seems to be Augustine's view when he says that "whatever deformity was in it [the body], and served to exhibit the penal condition in which we mortals are, should

be restored in such a way that, while the substance is entirely preserved, the deformity shall perish" (*City of God* 22: 19, 561). This line of thought has already been rejected. Second, one could think that all disabilities are the result of the fall even if they don't involve bad-difference. But if disability doesn't involve bad-difference, why think sin is relevant to its explanation?

29. Of course, we have good reasons to think that biological sex isn't nearly as binary as Aquinas thought it was. Aquinas's reasoning in the *SCG* may also give us reason to think that various intersexed conditions will also be present in heaven. See Merrick 2011 for a similar discussion.

30. Theologian John Hull, who is also blind, makes this connection. For Hull, theological reflection on disability can expand our theological understanding. And

the same is true in some ways of feminist theology. It was a man's Bible and a man's church and women were made to feel that they had to put feminine characteristics behind them and act like a man, although even that was scarcely permitted. . . . When we consider disability theology as a kind of frontier theology [which refers to the ways that theology "seeks to interpret some area of human life which lies outside Christian faith, or which seems at first sight to lie outside" (54)], we discover that disability itself is not a problem. What faith does is to grasp people with disabilities and pull them into the body of Christ, where, as Paul says, the parts that were sometimes looked down on are now given the highest honours.

(Hull 2014, 96f.)

31. I'm thankful for comments from Aaron Cobb, Jason Eberl, Blake Hereth, Hud Hudson, John Swinton, and Hillary Yancy. This paper also benefited from comments by Robin Dembroff and Mike Rea on Timpe 2020.

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