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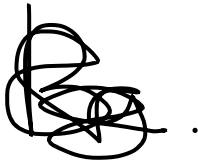
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I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.

Name: Bernadette van den Berg

Student number: 5995078

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The Concept of Theodicy in Steinbeck's *East of Eden*

Bernadette van den Berg

5995078

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Thesis Supervisor: Dr. O.R. Kusters

Second Reader: Dr. N. Landman

Abstract

For years, research on Steinbeck's *East of Eden* focussed on the concept of *timshel* when considering the theme of 'good and evil' in the novel. This resulted in the fact that these articles mainly focussed on the biblical meaning of the novel and do not take the cultural context of the novel into consideration. This study approaches *East of Eden* from a cultural point of view; Steinbeck wrote the novel in a period of religious turmoil since people started questioning the goodness of God just after the Second World War. Theories which defend the goodness of God, even though there is evil present in the world, are called 'theodicy theories.' This research offers a new insight by examining the presence of such a theory in *East of Eden*. The study will show that there is a theodicy theory explained in the novel, which can be seen by analysing some of the major characters.

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Introduction

John Steinbeck's novel *East of Eden* (published in 1952) has been analysed extensively on its theme of good vs evil and on the interpretation that every individual can choose 'good' over 'evil.' In 1990, for example, David Stewart McCright wrote about Steinbeck's use of the story of Cain and Abel and his use of the word *timshel* in this theme of overcoming evil (1-8). Luchen Li explored where this ethical dimension in Steinbeck's novels comes from (63). Luchen Li argues that Steinbeck's perception of mankind is rooted in the Western Christian religion (66). This explains Steinbeck's use of biblical allusions and echoes parts of the Christian mentality of the USA in the twentieth century. The choice of being good instead of evil reflects a discussion of free will explored by Yuji Kami in 2013 (219-229). Kami claims that it is necessary for one to have a sense of sin before he can enjoy 'free will' (220). Barbara Heavilin also wrote about free will and focussed especially on the ending of *East of Eden* and the meaning that lies behind this scene; besides this, she also reflects on the Cain and Abel story that is hidden in *East of Eden* (75-89). However, all these researches about free will, 'timshel,' and the theme of good and evil are limited to the biblical message of the novel. When looking at the Christian culture in the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century, it is shown that the whole idea of 'goodness' is actually questioned in these decades. This questioning is typically part of a theodicy; a defence of God, trying to answer the question why a good God would allow for evil things to happen.

In this research I will first further investigate the notion of theodicy, by explaining, in chapter 1 what the difference is between moral evils and natural evils, and monism and dualism. After that, I will explain the theodicy theories of two major thinkers, Augustine and Irenaeus, as later theodicy theories often echo these two types of theodicy model (Hick, 201, 215). In chapter 2 I will discuss to what extent the concepts of evil and free will appear in *East of Eden*. I will do that by first analysing the character of Cathy Ames and then the Trask family. This

will bring up the topic of free will through the concept of the term *timshel*. In the next part I will discuss the core of a theodicy theory in *East of Eden*, based on two questions: What is evil and where does it come from? To discuss the presence of a theodicy theory in *East of Eden*, I will first analyse the novel through these questions. Then I will discuss the concept of free will because this element is central to Augustine's and Irenaeus' theodicy. My conclusions and their implications on a possible fresh reading of the novel will take into account the more traditional interpretations.

Through this research I will seek to answer the question to what extent *East of Eden*, written just after the Second World War when the notion of theodicy became again more 'popular,' can be read through the lens of a post-Second World War theodicy.

Chapter 1: Theodicy Theory and its Formation

John Steinbeck's 19th novel *East of Eden* was first published in 1952, shortly after the Second World War. This was, in the United States, a period of religious turmoil. Christianity in the USA became stronger in the late 19th century (Hill, 446); however, it "underwent a period of crisis in the early twentieth century as it grappled with liberalism and modernism" (446-447). Shortly after the Second World War, Christianity became more prominent again (447). In the first fifteen years after the War, church attendance grew in Europe and the USA; it was, however, also "a time of crisis and the rethinking of traditional attitudes" (428). The Second World War was not the only mass killing mankind had to face, "it was a century in which genocide and mass killings seemed to proliferate throughout the world" (430). This caused people to question the 'goodness' of their God, because a loving God would not allow for such suffering (430). So, people did not stop believing in their God after the Second World War, but they put the goodness of their God in perspective because of the misery they saw in the world.

Two centuries earlier, questions like these were asked just after the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755; many people died during this earthquake and it appalled many people, causing them to question their God (Hill, 430-431; Neiman, 27-29). Philosophical theology named this the issue of 'theodicy' (Hill 431). According to John Hick, these 'theodicy theories' tackled the following question: "Can the presence of evil in the world be reconciled with the existence of a God who is unlimited both in goodness and in power?" (Hick, 3). The word 'theodicy' is derived from the Greek words for 'God' (Greek: *Theos*) and 'justice' (Greek: *dikē*); thus it is a defence of the justice of God. It is commonly thought that Gottfried Leibniz coined the term in 1710 when his book *Essays of Theodicy, on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* was published (Hick, 6; Van Woudenberg, 181). In his book, Leibniz claimed that the creator had made the best world possible and that because of this we could not know if

the world would be able to exist without evils (Van Woudenberg 181-182). There are, however, many more views on why evil and a perfectly good God can exist simultaneously.

Moral Evils and Natural Evils

John Hick, in his book *Evil and the God of Love*, aims to expound the problem of good and evil (Hick, xi). He argues that there is a distinction between ‘moral evils’ and ‘natural evils.’ Moral evils, he explains, originate from humans; they are the unjust deeds of humankind (12). Natural evils, on the other hand, originate without intervention of humans; they are issues like earthquakes, tornados and other natural disasters (12). Similarly, Richard Swinburne, in his article “Natural Evil,” describes moral evils as something deliberately brought into the world by mankind (Swinburne, 295), but in contrast with Hick he describes it as being done on purpose, while Hick only mentions they are ‘deeds’ (Hick, 12). Swinburne does this with regard to his free-will thesis later in his work. He states that “there must be natural evils (whether caused by natural processes or brought about accidentally by men) if men are to know how to cause evils themselves” (Swinburne, 299). So, if someone would harm another person by accident, Swinburne would classify that as a ‘natural evil,’ which teaches mankind how to cause evils deliberately. Natural evil is necessary for knowledge to base your free will on; it exists to teach the consequences of choices (Stump, 395). If someone would later do evil again, he would know the results of his deeds, thus deliberately choosing to harm someone, which would make it a moral evil. Eleonore Stump, however, in *The Problem of Evil*, argues that natural evils are not necessary for the knowledge Swinburne writes about (396). She claims for example, that God has the power to directly teach mankind about the consequences of their deeds, without violating their free will (396). She takes Belsen and Hiroshima as examples: “[They] were the results of significant exercises of free will, and those free choices would have been possible even if the world contained no birth defects, cancer, tornadoes, or drought” (Stump, 396).

Accordingly, the choices that led to this disaster, could still have been made without natural evils occurring beforehand (369). So even though theodicy models try to explain the nature of moral evils, they also have to take natural evils into consideration; something that, in the literature, appears to be more difficult.

Monism and Dualism

In theodicy theories, believers attempt to explain why these kinds of evil exist. According to Hick, these theories move between two opposite poles: monism and dualism (Hick, 15). Monism is the view that the universe is in complete harmony and claims that evil is not proven real, because if it could be seen in “its full cosmic context,” it would be identified as ‘good’ (15). In a monistic view, evil exists with God’s permission and has a purpose in His creation (15). This monism is often seen in Christianity: evil is viewed as God’s will and undebatable because it has a purpose. Dualism on the other hand opposes this final harmony and sees good and evil as opposites (15). It claims that this duality can be defeated by the destruction of one by the other (15). Paul Siwek analysed dualism in 1955; he states that two of the first dualistic religions were Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism (Siwek, 69). The former religion claims that there are two beings, one is evil and the other is good, who both have demiurgic powers (72). The latter is known through the writings of Saint Augustine and is, according to Siwek, seen as a combination of Christianity, Zoroastrism and Buddhism (73).

In Manichaeism, there existed two separate concepts before the creation of the world, light and darkness (73). Light had its kingdom in the upper domain and darkness in the lower domain; they lived together in peace until darkness crossed the boundary line, and it is believed that this war has been going on until today (74). Manichaeans believe that darkness created humans and that light sent prophets to release light from mankind, in the last era of history, light would conquer over darkness and they would be separated forever (75). The idea of two

different beings is seen in contemporary Christianity as well. According to some believers there is both a God and a Satan. When comparing both monism and dualism it can be noted, however, that in the Christian faith monism is accepted more widely than dualism; even Saint Augustine rejected dualism when he converted to Christianity (Van Woudenberg, 179).

Major Thinkers

In his work *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), John Hick discusses three major thinkers on the theodicy problem, Augustine, Irenaeus and Plotinus. Aurelius Augustinus was born in AD 354 and was a bishop of Hippo from 396 until he died in AD 430; Irenaeus was born in AD 130 and died in 202 AD; he was made bishop of Lyon. Before Hick explains the Augustinian type of theodicy, he discusses the Plotinian theodicy, because he argues that there are echoes of the Plotinian type of theodicy in the Augustinian type (Hick, 40); after these two he explains the Irenaean type of theodicy. Because of Hick's argument that Plotinus' ideas echo in Augustine's ideas, I will only focus on the Augustinian and the Irenaean types.

Augustine

An important place to start the discussion on Augustine's theodicy theory is Augustine's assumption that God is a perfect being, God is infinite in goodness and in power and supreme (Hick, 39, 44). Hick summarises Augustine's writings on evil in four different aspects: firstly, the question of what evil actually is; secondly, where evil comes from; third the problem of metaphysical evil; and fourthly the aesthetic theme in Augustine's writings (37-38). Because the first two questions form the core of most theodicy models, I will focus mainly on these questions to be able to compare Augustine better with other models.

Augustine did not deny the presence of evil, but God would not be the source of it (39). In his view, the whole creation, including human beings, is good; there can be no being which

is evil (44-45). Thus, if evil is not in fact a ‘being’ or a ‘force’ which, as we saw in the dualistic approach, opposes the goodness in creation, then, Hick claims, in Augustine evil is the ‘malfunctioning’ of something that is essentially good, as created by God (45). Augustine himself often calls this *privatio boni*, the ‘lack of good.’ All creatures are created ‘good’ in the divine order; if a creature, however, refrains from acting as it is supposed to, this absence of its good order is named ‘evil’ (47). Augustine himself explains this absence of good by comparing it to a sick animal: when an animal is sick it can be seen as a ‘privation of health,’ the form of evil which he calls sickness are gone when the animal is cured (Augustine in Hick, 47-48). This is Augustine’s argument for his idea that evil does not exist *sui generis*.

After exploring what Augustine sees as ‘evil,’ it can be discussed where this evil in the world comes from. To analyse his answer to this question, I will take a closer look at Augustine’s defence of free-will. According to Hick, Augustine ascribes evil to the wrong choices of intelligent beings (Hick, 59). This started at the Fall and continues today (60). The ‘primary sin’ is a voluntarily turning from ‘the highest good,’ being God, to some more inferior good (60). When mankind turns toward this lesser good, it is not the lesser good which is evil, but the turning itself, because it is not what God designed mankind to turn to. God created all human ‘good’ and thus he is not the source of evil (Vorster, 28).

Irenaeus

Irenaeus based his theodicy on the idea that man is created “in the image and likeness of God (Hick, 211). Image, or ‘imago’ is simply man’s disposition as a rational being (Hick, 211; Van Woudenberg 178). The “likeness of God” is harder to achieve; Irenaeus describes human life as a development; the world is seen as a place for spiritual growth to achieve the “likeness of God” (Van Woudenberg 178). Humans are created as flawed creatures for they have to go through “moral development and spiritual growth in order to reach the perfection that God has

intended for them” (178). Irenaeus also poses a solution to the problem why God would allow for natural and moral evils. It would be that God allows for natural evils because it gives mankind a chance to build their character and to grow spiritually; moral evils, on the other hand, exist because the misuse of free will is the cause of evil (178). Because evil actions have certain results, Irenaeus thinks it is good that God does not intervene and prevents these actions; the consequences of bad actions enable mankind to learn from them and build their character to reach perfection in the end and show the likeness of God (178).

In *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Eric Osborn states, that Irenaeus claimed that God gave mankind the freedom of choice (Osborn, 232-233). Mankind has two options to choose between: either he chooses obedience to God, or he does not. He will, when choosing to disobey, “justly incur the judgement of God” (233). Osborn explains why, in Irenaeus’ theodicy, God would give mankind free will. He sent prophets to convince people to act justly and to obey Him, but people have to make their own choice in this (233). The reason for this is that God cannot determine people’s moral lives because it would make Himself irrelevant and people would not grow spiritually from their mistakes to eventually show the likeness of God (233). Osborn summarises this as follows:

He who would become God must first fulfil the obedience of a created being. Then he will be perfectly formed by God’s hands, while those who remove themselves from the light of God the father go to darkness and punishment. They are themselves the cause of their eternal dwelling in regions of darkness. (Osborn, 233)

According to Osborn, God would be irrelevant if there is no free will because He cannot honour those who do good or teach about consequences to people who do bad (233). “The immensity of his goodness is evident in the way in which he is always adding something more to man” (234) If mankind has no option to disobey or to harm someone, God would not have something

to add to him. In Osborn's summary "he who would become God" means 'achieving the likeness of God.'

To sum up, the difference between the Augustinian theodicy and the Irenaean type of theodicy is that Augustine claimed that God created perfectly good beings and that evil is the privation of good. Irenaeus, on the other hand, argued that God created mankind in a stage where it still needs to grow towards perfection, while he sees dealing with evil as chance for mankind to show the likeness of God.

Chapter 2: Evil and Free Will in *East of Eden*

To consider the use of a theodicy theory in *East of Eden*, firstly the theme of good and evil needs to be further explored. Eva Králová, in “Inseparability of Good and Evil as a Challenge in Steinbeck’s *East of Eden*,” through an analysis of the main characters “with their allusion to the Genesis” concludes that the fight to overcome sin is a struggle that every generation has to deal with, “as these are individual’s own decisions which form his or her destiny” (Králová, 57). Besides the Hamiltons family, Králová also focusses on Cathy Ames.

Cathy Ames

Cathy Ames is introduced in chapter 8 of *East of Eden*. She is the wife of Adam Trask and mother of Caleb and Aron Trask. Other names she is referred to in the novel are Kate Trask and Kate Albey.

As earlier described, John Hick defines ‘moral evils’ as the unjust deeds of humans, and the way Cathy is introduced perfectly fits in this description. Her name is mentioned after a description of monsters in society “born in the world to human parents” (Steinbeck, 89). These monsters are described as having a “malformed soul”; and “to a monster”, the narrator adds, “the norm is monstrous” (89). This implies that people who are described as monstrous by Steinbeck, think that what they do is normal. The narrator explains that Cathy was not like other people and that, from birth onwards, she never was (90). This indicates that she is “a variation” and thus can be seen as a monster. It is said that in earlier times, “Cathy would have been called possessed by the devil” (90). And still, because Cathy had “a face of innocence” people felt ‘uneasy’ around her “as though she carried a nameless danger” (90-91). Králová describes her as symbolising “darkness,” (Králová, 53), and she is not the only one who characterises this character as evil. In “Cathy Ames and Rhoda Penmark: Two Child Monsters” Roy Simmonds

focuses on two characters from two different novels: Rhoda Penmark from William March's *The Bad Seed* and Cathy Ames from Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. Both women are described as "[p]athological liars and cold-blooded murderers" (Simmonds, 91). Simmonds emphasises that the evil actions of Cathy emerge from "her awareness at the early age of ten of the sex impulse" (94). This would, according to Simmonds, also explain her later career as a brothel-keeper in Boston (94-95). He argues that the authors of the novels claim that society is inhabited by monstrous people like Cathy and Rhoda and that people should be on their guard concerning innocent faces like Cathy Ames's "mysteriously sleepy face" (Simmonds, 101; Steinbeck, 90).

In the chapter Cathy is introduced, it is said that she knows how to use impulse in others "for her own gain" (Steinbeck, 92). As mentioned in Simmonds' article, Cathy learned that "sexuality ... is the most disturbing impulse humans have ... because the subject was unmentionable and unmentioned" (92-93). Cathy seems to be aware of this and "learned that by the manipulation and use of this one part of people she could gain and keep power over nearly anyone" (93); this implies that she consciously abuses this power to commit evil actions.

One of these actions is the situation in which she sets up a scene in which it seemed that two boys are raping her. Her mother finds Cathy with two boys in a carriage house while Cathy "lay on the floor, her skirts pulled up ... beside her two boys about fourteen were kneeling ... Cathy's wrists were tied with a heavy rope" (94-95). When the boys are caught, they are whipped but nevertheless stick to their story; they say that they paid Cathy five cents and that they "had not tied her hands," she was just playing with a rope (95-96). Even though no-one believes what they say, Mr. Ames is suspicious: "There were things he did not understand, but he did not bring them up" (95). Another example occurs when Cathy is in secondary school. Her Latin teacher becomes "desperately infatuated with her" (Simmonds, 94), and she seduces the man; he writes "persuasive" letters, and when she rejects him in the end, he commits suicide (Steinbeck, 98-100; Simmonds, 94). When her parents ask her if she noted anything strange

about him, she makes up a lie saying that her teacher had “some kind of trouble in Boston” (Steinbeck, 100); Everyone believes her: “[N]o one could possibly imagine that Cathy had planted the story. Even Mrs. Ames had forgotten where she heard it” (100). What seems to be the case with every instance of evil action Cathy commits, is that she always acts consciously.

In “A Paradoxical World in *East of Eden*: The Theory of Free Will and the Heritage of Puritanism” (2013), Yuji Kami focuses on parts where Cathy occurs later in the novel, for example when Adam visits her at the brothel. In this scene Kami emphasises the occurrence of the question “Do you mean that in the whole world there’s only evil and folly?”, to which Cathy has a positive answer (Kami, 221).

Adam Trask, Caleb and Aron Trask

Adam Trask can be seen as the protagonist of the novel. When the reader first meets Adam, he is still an only child; his parents are Cyrus Trask and “Mrs. Trask” (no first name given). Adam’s father is described as “something of a devil” and “wild by nature” (Steinbeck, 20), and his mother as an “inside-herself woman” (21). It is said that “[s]he used religion as a therapy for the ills of the world and of herself, and she changed the religion to fit the ill” (21). So, when Cyrus comes back from war and she does not need to communicate with her dead husband because he, unexpectedly, is still alive, she develops “a god of vengeance” (21). This god demands her to sacrifice herself, and thus she commits suicide by drowning herself in a shallow pond. Cyrus’ next wife is Alice Trask; she changed Cyrus in a way that the “energy which had made him wild now made him thoughtful” (23). Adam and Alice have a son together, Charles, and from this moment onwards Adam has a half-brother.

Adam’s relationship with his father is that of a soldier and his commander. Cyrus treats his sons like soldiers and “could not imagine any career for his sons except the army” (26). At one moment, Adam realises “[t]he techniques and training were not designed for the boys at all

but only to make Cyrus a great man” (27). He notices that his father is not as great as he thought he was. The narrator explains this process as “an aching kind of growing” because the child realises the parents do not have “divine intelligence” (27). But even though Adam has a more adult view of his father, Cyrus tells him explicitly that he is his favourite son: “I love you better. I always have. This may be a bad thing to tell you, but it’s true. I love you better” (37).

When Adam lives with Charles, they find Cathy beaten up on their porch. Adam takes care of her and eventually even marries her. With money Cyrus left him, he buys a house to live in with Cathy. But after Cathy gives birth to twin boys, she shoots Adam in the shoulder and leaves for Salinas to work in a brothel. Adam becomes deeply depressed because his wife is a different person than he thought she was. His children are raised by Lee, his servant; it takes Adam a long time to name his children; Samuel Hamilton, the well-respected patriarch of the Hamilton family, even has to force him to do so: “Samuel said, ‘I can’t think in my mind of a dull man picking up a rock, who before evening would not put a name to it – like Peter. And you – for a year you’ve lived with your heart’s draining and you’ve not even laid a number to the boys’” (314-315). When his children grow older, the same preference for one child as his own father had with him appears; he seems to prefer Aron over Caleb. Similarly, the same jealousy Charles had over Adam is now visible in Caleb. The Genesis story of Cain and Abel seems to be moving from generation to generation; Caleb seems to be a copy of Charles; where Charles feels rejected by his father because Cyrus loves Adam more than him, so is Caleb jealous of Aron because people prefer Aron over him: “No one liked Cal very much ... Aron drew love from every side” (513).

To win Adam’s love, Caleb tries to make money by selling beans. When Adam opens the package, Caleb does not know what to say: “It’s – I made it – to give to you – to make up for losing the lettuce” (655). When Caleb feels that Adam is going to reject his offer, he “caught a feeling – a feeling of calamity of destruction in the air, and a weight of sickness overwhelmed

him” (655). Adam rejects him by comparing Caleb to his other son Aron: “I would have been so happy if you could have given me – well, what your brother has – pride in the thing he’s doing, gladness in his progress. Money, even clean money, doesn’t stack up with that” (656). Out of anger, Caleb shows Aron where their mother works. This makes Aron decide to enlist for the army, and he dies in what would later become known as World War I.

Free Will

Kami argues that Steinbeck’s main point is that people are born either with or without free will (Kami, 222). To prove this argument, she claims that at different moments in the novel, Adam, Aron, and Cathy are represented as the characters who are born without free will and “can do nothing but follow their genetic code” (226). Kami also quotes Lee, Adam’s housekeeper: “He couldn’t help it, Cal. That’s his nature. It was the only way he knew. He didn’t have any choice. But you have. Don’t you hear me? You have a choice” (Steinbeck, 657). This implies that Lee seems to believe that Cal was born *with* the capacity to have a free will. He does not have to be like his father and grandfather. He can overcome the genetic line of behaviour.

Lee is a key figure in this theme of ‘free will’; he is the one who discovers the term *timshel* in the novel.

“Don’t you see?” he cried. “The American Standard translation *orders* men to triumph over sin, and you can call sin ignorance. The King James translation makes a promise in ‘Thou shalt,’ meaning that men will surely triumph over sin. But the Hebrew word, the word *timshel* – ‘Thou mayest’ – that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man. For if ‘Thou mayest’ – it is also true that ‘Thou mayest not.’ (Steinbeck, 369-370)

This word *timshel* thus implies that man is free to choose his own path in life, but that any choice implies a responsibility for the ensuing actions. Lee picks the word from the scene from

Genesis in which God speaks to Cain when he is about to kill his brother, implying that Cain is responsible for his own actions. At the end of *East of Eden*, Lee begs Adam to forgive his son Caleb because Adam is going to die and Caleb “will be the only remnant left” of him, because Aron died in the war (727). Lee blames Adam for rejecting his son, which is why Caleb brought Aron to his mother, which is ultimately the reason Aron joined the army where he died. Near the end of his life, Adam is able to whisper the word *timshel*, implying that Caleb has the choice of overcoming evil and not be like his parents.

The dynamics of evil and *East of Eden* have been analysed through characters displaying the most relevant features for this discussion. In chapter 3, I will argue that, rather than implementing one or both of the conventional approaches (Augustine’s or Irenaeus’), John Steinbeck sets up a theodicy in its own right.

Chapter 3: Steinbeck's Theodicy

What is Evil?

One of the first descriptions of evil in the novel, occurs when Cyrus takes his son Adam out for a walk: "Look now—in all of history men have been taught that killing of men is an evil thing not to be countenanced. Any man who kills must be destroyed because this is a great sin, maybe the worst sin we know" (Steinbeck, 33). As argued earlier, Cathy can be seen as an evil character because she lies, blackmails, and makes people commit suicide. When taking this into consideration in comparison with what is discussed about natural and moral evils, it can be said that Hick's definition of a moral evil, "evil that we human beings originate: cruel, unjust, vicious, and perverse thoughts and deeds" appears in the novel through the character of Cathy. It also matches Swinburne's definition of moral evils because, as was shown earlier, Cathy commits these evils consciously. Consequently, when looking at Cathy Ames, evils in *East of Eden* can be classified as 'moral evils' when just looking at Cathy Ames.

In the Trask family, however, it is not clear whether there are only instances of 'moral evils.' Adam makes his son Caleb feel bad about his money-making and compares him with his other son Aron to give him a bad feeling about himself. It is not clear whether he does so consciously or not. If Adam does it consciously, it can be argued that this is a moral evil. If, however, he acts unconsciously, it can be seen as a natural evil because it is done on purpose and meant to teach Adam a lesson about what is evil. Lee demands of him his blessing of his only living son Caleb because he "is marked with guilt out of himself" (728). This is because, as earlier described, Caleb is the reason Aron joined the army. However, if Adam treated both of his sons equally, Caleb would not have felt this bitterness towards his brother. The fact that Adam gives Caleb his blessing on his deathbed, shows that he did develop his character after his sins, which is also in line with Irenaeus' type of theodicy.

When looking at Irenaeus's definition of Evil, Cathy does not seem to follow this because it can be questioned to what extent her personality improves as a consequence of her own actions. When Cal shows Aron where his mother works, Cathy sees "Cal's eyes with their look of sluggish and fulfilled cruelty" (661). After this incident, the bouncer of the brothel "heard a tone of weakness in [Cathy]" which he had not heard before (662). In a way, there is a development in her character; she shows more weakness than before. However, this is not because of her own actions; it is because Cal decided to bring his brother; taking this even further, it is a consequence of Adam's actions neglecting Caleb.

Where does Evil Come from?

In *East of Eden* there seem to be two instances where the source of evil is explicitly discussed.

Firstly, it is discussed shortly after Adam met Cathy:

Maybe we all have in us a secret pond where evil and ugly things germinate and grow strong. But this culture is fenced, and the swimming brood climbs up only to fall back. Might it not be that in the dark pools of some men the evil grows strong enough to wriggle over the fence and swim free? (Steinbeck, 162)

The narrator of the novel implies with this that all people have some kind of evil force in them; however, to some people, this force grows big enough to make people commit evil actions. It is asked by the narrator: "Would not such a man be our monster, and are we not related to him in our hidden water?" (162). What is meant here is that because everyone has an evil pond in them, the person having a stronger force is still related because of that common aspect.

Another instance is when Caleb, his girlfriend Abra, and Lee discuss Adam's deathbed because he is on his last legs. Lee lets Abra and Caleb think about the inheritance of evil, he says: "Can you think that whatever made us – would stop trying?" (726). In this scene, Lee implies that there is a god-like figure who created mankind and keeps improving creation.

However, to improve something means there must be faults in creation as well. It can be argued that the ‘evil forces’ in people’s ‘dark pools’ are these faults in creation. Lee says: “Does a craftsman, even in his old age, lose his hunger for a perfect cup ... and then either the slag heap or, perhaps what no one in the world ever quite gives up, perfection” (726). This implies that Lee wants to tell Caleb and Abra that creation is not perfect: the ‘craftsman of creation’ keeps improving it. This is also in line with what is earlier said about the idea that Caleb is able to overcome the line of behaviour given to him by his parents and grandfather.

Because Lee argues that the god-figure keeps improving his creation, it can be argued that the idea of *timshel* is acquired through divine intervention. In the Bible that Lee finds the concept in, God pronounces the word *timshel* to Cain. If it is said that God keeps improving his creation, it can be argued that God, in this theodicy model, sent the word *timshel* to Lee through divine inspiration so Adam could make Caleb feel better about his evil ancestry and break that generational line of evil and thus improve creation.

A New Reading

Earlier approaches to *East of Eden* have researched the biblical message that can be read in the novel. Yuji Kami, for example, states that “[u]ltimately Steinbeck creates a paradoxically moral world in *East of Eden*, in which Caleb and Abra eventually enact a triumphal drama for the theory of free will, while simultaneously noting the inextricable connection with the reciprocal Puritan doctrines of original sin and predestination” (Kami, 227-228). Kami notes that the story shows an odd contrast between the concept of *timshel* and free will, and the predestination idea that people have “dark pools of evil” (Steinbeck, 162) in them. However, if the book is read as a theodicy model this is not simply a contrast, but a shift that suggests an entirely new interpretation of the book.

Previous readings saw the book as a way of saying that there is a possibility to overcome sin, even if ancestors are evil (Kami, 220; McRight, 1-8; Luchen Li, 66). The theodicy behind *East of Eden*, however, implies there is a god who continuously intervenes in his creation to make it perfect. All people are born with a capacity to be evil which in some people is stronger than in others. Free will is a concept brought into the world by divine intervention; it is discovered by Lee and gives some people the choice to overcome sin. It is given to Caleb because his god wanted to intervene in his hereditary line of behaviour because this is not perfect yet. This reading shifts the focus of the novel from the explanation of the concept of *timshel* to a parable around a theodicy theory of Steinbeck's own making. This changes the interpretation of the novel, since it implies that the concept of *timshel* is just a minor improvement for a small group of people in a much bigger creation; beside that, the problem of evil in Cathy is not solved yet. This means that Steinbeck's theodicy theory is not airtight since the creator is still working on its creation. The theodicy concept explored in *East of Eden* is different to that of Augustine because he claims that God is the source of evil, while in Steinbeck's novel, man is the source of evil. It cannot be said that Augustine's stance on free will is represented in the novel. *East of Eden* shows that free will is a means of God to perfect his creation, not something used by people to consciously turn against God. Irenaeus is represented in this conceptualisation more so than Augustine; his theory is represented in the character of Adam but as shown above, not in that of Cathy.

Conclusion

This research examined the presence of a theodicy theory in John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. This was done by analysing the dynamics of evil and free will in *East of Eden* by means of the characters displaying the most relevant traits feeding into this dynamic. It has been demonstrated that most of all it is Cathy Ames who shows moral evils in her actions committed in daily life. Besides that, depending on which definition of 'natural evil' is used, it is shown that Adam Trask performs natural evils because it is not said that he commits the evils consciously but later learned from them. The source of evil is discussed in the last part of this thesis; it is said that every human being has a source of evil in them, but that to most people it does not grow strong. In *East of Eden* it is also said there is a god-like figure who created mankind and keeps improving creation until it is perfect. It has been proven that free will is a means for mankind, given by this creator, to improve themselves.

Taking everything into consideration, it can be concluded that *East of Eden* does show a theodicy theory. The novel shows what evil is, where it comes from, and demonstrates how its presence can be justified despite the presence of a god-like figure. It can be questioned to what extent this god-like figure is an omnipotent creator. It can be argued that, because the creator did not finish his creation yet and is still improving it, the creator can be omnipotent once creation is finished and is perfect, but further research needs to discuss the presence of an omnipotent divine being in Steinbeck's novel. To existing literature, this research adds a theory which implies that Steinbeck believed in divine intervention in an unfinished creation. This can be taken into consideration to further research as well.

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