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# *Atonement*: response to critics

ELEONORE STUMP

*Saint Louis University, Department of Philosophy, 3800 Lindell Blvd, St. Louis, MO, 63108, USA*
*e-mail: eleonore.stump@slu.edu*

**Abstract:** **In this article, I respond to articles by Faith Pawl, Anne Jeffrey, and Kathryn Pogin that raise issues related to my book *Atonement.* The topics covered include the suffering of beasts, the necessity of Christ's atonement, the relationship of my interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement and that of Thomas Aquinas, and social and communal guilt and shame.**

## Introduction

No matter how big a book on a particular topic is, and no matter how many potential objections to its central claims are considered in it, there will always be other issues that the author has not thought of. And so I am grateful to the respondents whose thoughtful articles are printed here for this opportunity to think about further philosophically interesting subjects raised by some of the themes in my book *Atonement.*[1]

In the overview of the book included above, I have presented a brief summary of the book and its methodology. Here I will do what I can to engage with the three articles by Faith Pawl, Anne Jeffrey, and Kathryn Pogin, which discuss various topics in the book and raise questions or concerns about one or another of them. I am grateful to these three respondents for their stimulating work. Each of the three articles is insightful and helpful, and I am glad of the chance to clarify one or another element in the book in consequence of their questions and concerns. I am only sorry that in the short space available to me here, I am not able to comment on all of the interesting matters which these articles raise.

## Response to Faith Pawl

In her article, Faith Pawl highlights the theory of satisfaction I argued for. In interpretations of the doctrine of the atonement that fall into the Anselmian family of theories of atonement, the emphasis is on Christ's making satisfaction to God



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and by that means winning for human beings a pardon for their sins. It is generally supposed that if a human being has a pardon from God for all his sins, then his guilt is removed. I argued that this claim is not acceptable, because a pardon from God does not by itself alter the wrongdoer's psyche to return it to a non-guilty state and, perhaps more importantly, it does nothing to remedy the wrongdoer's responsibility for the harm and injustice he did in his wrongdoing. Consequently, I argued, a pardon even from God is not sufficient to remove all the lamentable leftovers of human moral wrongdoing.

On the interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement I argued for, which I dubbed 'the Marian interpretation', I presented a different understanding of the notion of satisfaction central to the doctrine. On the Marian interpretation, the satisfaction accomplished by the life, passion, and death of Christ yields a benefit to the victims of human evil and thereby in addition becomes a gift given to God. On this way of thinking about the satisfaction brought about by Christ's life, passion, and death, the doctrine of the atonement and a candidate solution to the problem of evil are intimately connected. That is because what has to be offered to a human sufferer to justify God in allowing her suffering is in effect what is provided for her by the atonement of Christ. That good is so great and so inextricably interwoven with her suffering that it defeats the suffering for her. Insofar as a wrongdoer allies himself in love with Christ's offering of that good to the victim of the wrongdoing, to that extent Christ's own suffering is vicarious satisfaction made on behalf of the wrongdoer. And so (on this painfully compressed summary of an extensive part of the book) the Marian interpretation can do what Anselmian interpretations cannot: it can show the way in which Christ's life, passion, and death remove (or, more precisely, contribute to removing) the guilt of human wrongdoers in virtue of Christ's defeat of human suffering for those sufferers who will accept it.

In this account, I highlight human wrongdoing as it impacts other human beings. But, as Pawl points out, I do acknowledge that human wrongdoing is not limited to causing suffering to other human beings; it includes also, as I said, 'the unspeakable suffering it has inflicted on the beasts, and the suicidal destruction it is perpetrating on the planet'.[2] And so, Pawl rightly asks, what about *this* human wrongdoing? If the removal of guilt requires the redress of the effects of wrongdoing, as I argued, then what about human guilt for the harm and injustice inflicted on non-human parts of creation? If the atonement of Christ has the effect of removing human guilt and shame, is there some way in which the satisfaction that Christ makes constitutes some redress for this human wrongdoing also? In what follows, I will call this last question 'Pawl's question'.

Pawl's question is one that I did not consider, not least because the issue it raises is one that is never (as far as I know) discussed in the history of interpretations of the doctrine of the atonement. But it is a good question and one worth pursuing insofar as it is possible to do so, given the relevant information that we have and the parts of theology that might be thought to bear on the question. And it is possible to make *some* headway with it.

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To begin with, it is not hard to give a general and abstract answer to Pawl's question. That is because we can see that, to answer it, we need these things:

(1) an account of the ill effects of human wrongdoing on beasts and other created things, that is, an account of their suffering (whether or not suffering needs to be understood analogously in this connection),
(2) an account of what would in principle defeat such suffering.
(3) an explanation of what connection there might be between the defeat of such suffering and Christ's life, passion, and death,

and finally

(4) an explanation of the way in which that connection can become vicarious satisfaction for human wrongdoers.

Of these four things needed, the easiest to deal with is (1). As I explained the suffering of human beings in an earlier book,

> suffering occurs when something goes significantly contrary to the nature of the sufferer or to the will of the sufferer or both. On this way of thinking about suffering, suffering is a function of what we care about, our flourishing in our nature as human beings or our heart's desires in the central core of the web of desire in our wills.[3]

If we bracket the issue involving heart's desire – and it might well be that we should not do so, at least for many species of beasts – then we can nonetheless understand the harm done to beasts and inanimate parts of creation in terms of their flourishing or their thriving. Arguably, on certain metaphysical views such as those of Aquinas, even an inanimate thing has a nature; and any thing, any animal, thrives or flourishes when the potentiality characteristic of its species is fulfilled.[4] So the suffering of beasts and other created things is (at least) a function of their failure to thrive or flourish.

And this claim then gives some help with (2). A benefit defeating the harm and injustice done to beasts and other created things must also be a function of their flourishing. That is, for their suffering to be defeated, there must be some benefit that outweighs the suffering because the benefit enables them to flourish even more than they would have done without the suffering, and the benefit must be such that it could not (in some sense of that modality) have been obtained without the suffering.

But this help with (2) is just enough to show the magnitude of the challenge facing any attempt to answer Pawl's question. The attempt founders already at (2). In fact, in my earlier attempt to present and support a defence for the problem of suffering, I excluded consideration of the suffering of beasts because, in my view, we are in a position to know that we do not currently know enough about the subjective experiences of beasts to examine what might redeem suffering for them. It is also very likely that the beasts' capacities for subjective experience and the varieties of such experience vary widely from species to

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species, so that discussing what might defeat animal suffering would require going from one species to another, in what would have to be a lengthy and ethologically learned examination. And if it is hard to know what would defeat the suffering of beasts, it is even harder to know what would redeem the disfigurement and destruction of inanimate creation. [5]

To appreciate this problem, consider, as an example of animal suffering, an elephant in a circus; and then consider, as an example of the devastation of the earth, the land around Chernobyl. The circus elephant might die without any amelioration of its suffering, to say nothing of its flourishing. And the land around Chernobyl is unlikely to be completely healed ever, to say nothing of its being made even more flourishing than it was before the nuclear accident. What would defeat or redeem the harm done to non-human created things in these cases? As far as I can see, on the evidence available to us and the theological doctrines relevant to the matter, the best one can say is something like this. There is theological warrant in biblical texts for the claim that in a final messianic age even beasts, even inanimate creation, will be restored to peace and beauty, that is, to flourishing. But what is at issue in these biblical prophecies is typically a new creation. The old creation passes away. Consequently, there is no question of a particular elephant's having its suffering redeemed, or a particular parcel of ground having its disfigurement turned into blooming. And so (2) is highly problematic.

If (2) poses great difficulties, (3) seems even worse. What could possibly tie a defeat of the suffering of beasts and other created things to the atonement of Christ? As far as I can see, the best one can say is that there is some biblical and theological warrant for an idea along these lines. The original plan for creation is that human beings would have *dominium* over all of creation. That is, human beings would be to the rest of creation what God is to human beings – providing care that enables the thing cared for to flourish. With the Fall, human beings in fact become one of the main instruments of the harm and injustice suffered by beasts and other created things. Consequently, it may be that human beings who are redeemed through the atonement of Christ will work to restore the flourishing of what human beings had previously hurt and damaged. If all creation is one interconnected whole, then both the destruction of created goods and their restoration would be impacted by the condition of human beings. On such a speculative hypothesis, it might be possible to make some connection between the atonement of Christ and the prophetically promised new creation. But even on this speculative hypothesis, all that could be said as regards (3) is that there is a redemption for the species of created things; there is nothing to redeem the suffering of particular beasts or particular inanimate parts of the created world.

This is not to say that no reasonable explanation of the sort wanted in (3) could be found. Rather, the point here is the same as the point with regard to (2): reason can see what reason cannot see. There is not sufficient evidence about the nature of the suffering of non-human creatures, and there is virtually no biblical or theological warrant, for dealing with (3).

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And without some suitable account for (2) and (3), there is no hope for dealing appropriately with (4).

So it may be that at some time there will be enough evidence or enough development of orthodox theological doctrines to deal adequately with (1)–(4), or it may turn out that there is enough evidence to show that no acceptable treatment of (1)–(4) is possible. But, as matters now stand, it is reasonable to conclude that we are not currently in a position to deal reasonably with Pawl's excellent question or even to decide whether or not a reasonable answer is possible.

### Response to Anne Jeffrey

In her article, Anne Jeffrey explains that, on my view, the Marian interpretation falls within the group of interpretations of the doctrine of the atonement that I dubbed 'the Thomistic kind of interpretation'; and she asks whether the Marian interpretation differs from Aquinas's own interpretation by developing what is incomplete in the Thomistic interpretation or by disagreeing with it.

Put very succinctly, as I explained Aquinas's interpretation of the doctrine, human beings are saved from their sins and united to God by divine grace. Without violating human free will, God's operative grace produces in a human person a will for a will that wills the good; and God's cooperative grace works with that partially healed human will to increase in it the strength for willing the good. For Aquinas, in his passion and death Christ produced many good effects for human beings; but the main one was the provision of this grace in virtue of Christ's meriting it from God. So, for example, Aquinas says,

> grace was bestowed upon Christ, not only as an individual, but inasmuch as he is the head of the Church, so that grace might overflow into Christ's members; and therefore Christ's works are referred to himself and to his members . . . Consequently, Christ by his passion merited salvation, not only for himself, but likewise for all his members.[6]

On Aquinas's interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement, then, the passion and death of Christ are a solution to the problem of human sinfulness because, in virtue of Christ's meriting this grace, his passion and death is responsible for the grace that heals the human will in virtue of meriting the saving grace for human beings.

Nonetheless, on Aquinas's view, God's justice does not require that any debt or penalty owed to God be paid or any punishment be imposed in order for human beings to be saved. So, for example, Aquinas says,

> if [God] had willed to free [human beings] from sin without any satisfaction, he would not have acted against justice. . . . [I]f God remits sin, which has the formality of fault in that it is committed against himself, he wrongs no one: just as anyone else who, without satisfaction, overlooks an offense against himself acts mercifully and not unjustly. And so David said when he sought mercy: *Against thee only have I sinned* (Ps.1:6), as if to say: [*You can*] *remit* [*my sins*] *for me without injustice.*[7]

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But then, I argued, there is a problem for Aquinas's interpretation of the doctrine. God clearly always has the power to give the grace that heals the human proneness to sin. And even if Christ's atonement merits grace, it is hard to see any reason for supposing that God would not be willing to give this grace even without Christ's meriting it. One might suppose that considerations of God's justice or honour of the sort given in interpretations of the Anselmian kind of interpretation of the doctrine explain the need for Christ's meriting grace. But Aquinas rejects such reasons, as the quotation given above shows. In fact Aquinas says repeatedly that God could have saved human beings from sin without Christ's passion and death. So, for example, in addition to the text cited above, Aquinas says, 'simpliciter and absolutely, it was possible for God to deliver human beings otherwise than by the passion of Christ, because "nothing is impossible with God" (Lk.1:37)'.[8]

But if God is able and willing to provide grace without the payment of any debt or penalty, and if the problem of human sinfulness is solved by God's provision of grace, then it is hard to understand the relation between Christ's passion and death and God's giving of grace. Not only does Christ's passion and death seem gratuitous to God's giving of grace, but, worse yet, Christ's passion and death seem actually inefficacious in the process of salvation. That is, on the Thomistic interpretation, not only could the good in question apparently be obtained without Christ's passion and death, but it seems that in fact the good in question could not be gotten *with* Christ's passion and death. If Christ's passion and death are to be efficacious as the remedy for human sin, it seems that there ought to be something about the passion and death of Christ that is a central ingredient of the remedy; that is, Christ's passion and death ought to be themselves instrumental to human beings' getting the grace that saves them. On Aquinas's account, however, Christ's passion and death seem to have no intrinsic role in human beings' getting grace. At best, one could say that they have an extrinsic role: God decided to give grace because of Christ's passion and death, although God could have decided to give grace without Christ's suffering. But then it seems that it is God's choice, not Christ's suffering, that actually brings about human salvation.

So the problem for Aquinas's interpretation lies in the connection between the grace that remedies the defects in the human will and the passion and death of Christ. It is not that anything Aquinas says on this score is mistaken or false; it is rather, as I argued, that a central part of a fully satisfactory interpretation of the doctrine is missing in his account because his interpretation provides no intrinsic role for Christ's passion and death in God's giving of grace.

Or think of the point this way. As Jeffrey highlights, Aquinas himself holds that Christ's atonement is a most fitting way for God to heal the post-Fall human defect in the will. He says, for example, 'It was more fitting that we should be freed [from sin] by the passion of Christ than by the divine will alone.'[9] But then it seems that there should be some intrinsic connection between salvation from sin and Christ's atonement that renders Christ's passion and death themselves a more fitting

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means to the giving of salvific grace than God's mere will to give grace would have been. It is true that Aquinas gives some examples of what makes the atonement of Christ more fitting (and his examples are different from those Jeffrey suggests). For instance, Aquinas says that as human beings fell through being deceived by the devil, it was fitting that they should be saved through the devil's being deceived.[10] But this example of fittingness, as also the others presented in that same text, give no intrinsic instrumental role to Christ's passion and death in the process of the divine provision of grace.

Consequently, on the view I hold and meant to be arguing for, Aquinas's interpretation is not mistaken or erroneous in some way. Rather, it is incomplete or underdeveloped. The missing part in Aquinas's interpretation of the doctrine, the connection between the grace that heals the human psyche and Christ's passion and death, is part of what I supposed the Marian interpretation of the doctrine could supply. On my view, then, the Marian interpretation should count only as a development of Aquinas's interpretation and not an opposed view of the doctrine of the atonement.

Finally, Jeffrey worries that in fact, contrary to what I suppose, the Marian interpretation might be in opposition to Aquinas's interpretation of the doctrine because of the claims the Marian interpretation makes about the necessity of Christ's passion and death to human salvation. Here the problem is that the modal claims associated with the doctrine are easy to confuse. It is worth reflecting in this connection that Aquinas takes himself to be able to maintain consistently both that Christ's passion and death were not necessary for human salvation and also that no one can come to the Father except through Christ,[11] so that apparently, after all, Christ's atonement is necessary to human salvation. Aquinas reconciles these claims by supposing that Christ's passion is not necessary simpliciter for human salvation but is conditionally necessary, that is, necessary given the way in which God has chosen to remedy the problem of the post-Fall human condition. So, for example, Aquinas says,

> Therefore, if it is said simpliciter and absolutely, [then] it was possible for God to deliver human beings otherwise than by the passion of Christ . . . But if it is said on some supposition, then it was not possible. That is because it is impossible for God's foreknowledge to be fallible or for his will or ordaining to be frustrated. So if the foreknowledge and foreordaining of God regarding the passion of Christ are presupposed, then it was not possible both for Christ not to suffer and for human beings to be delivered otherwise than by Christ's Passion.[12]

The Marian interpretation accepts this Thomistic view. On the Marian interpretation, the ultimate goal of Christ's atonement is a redeemed person's union with God, and that union is an image of the relations among the persons of the Trinity. It consists in mutual indwelling between God and the redeemed person: the Holy Spirit indwelling in her psyche, and she herself indwelling in Christ, as part of the body of Christ. As I explained the relation between mutual indwelling and Christ's life, passion, and death, on Christian theology Christ's

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atoning work has two different roles. In the first, Christ in his passion provides unilaterally one part of the mutual indwelling, namely, the indwelling of human psyches in God. On the conditionally necessary plan of atonement, no human being can come to union with God without Christ's having received in his own human mind the psyche of that person. For this part of the goal, then, on the Marian interpretation, Christ's passion is a necessary means to union with God – not absolutely or somehow metaphysically necessary, but conditionally necessary, that is, necessary given the way in which God chose to remedy the problem of the post-Fall human condition. So, on this score, there is no disagreement between the Marian interpretation and the Thomistic one.

In addition, on the Marian interpretation, in his life, passion and death Christ also provides the means for the other part of the mutual indwelling, namely, the surrender to God by a human being alienated from herself and from God. It is this surrender that enables the indwelling in her of the Holy Spirit. On the Marian interpretation, as I explained it, Christ's passion and death are the best means for God to help a human person to this surrender.

And here Jeffrey's worry might arise again, although in a different way. If Christ's atonement is the best means to the goal of human salvation, then would an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God not have to will this means? And if so, then would it not after all turn out to be the case that Christ's atonement is necessary to human salvation, not just conditionally, as Aquinas supposes, but also necessary simpliciter, since it is not possible, one might think, for a perfectly good, omniscient, omnipotent being to use less than the best means to human salvation. And so one might wonder whether the Marian interpretation is not after all in opposition to the Thomistic interpretation on this score.

Here, however, it is worth reflecting that Aquinas actually holds a similar position in virtue of maintaining that, although Christ's atonement is not absolutely necessary to human salvation because God could have chosen other means, it is nonetheless most fitting.[13] If a perfectly good God would have to choose the best means, it seems that he would also have to choose the most fitting means. So whatever difficulties there are for the Marian interpretation in holding that the atonement of Christ is only conditionally necessary and yet also the best means for achieving human salvation, the same difficulties will also affect Aquinas's interpretation, which includes the claims both that Christ's atonement is not necessary to salvation and also that Christ's atonement is the most fitting way to achieve human salvation.

To see the way in which the two apparently conflicting claims in either the Marian account or the Thomistic account can be reconciled with each other, it may help to consider analogous claims in medicine. Consider, for example, the claim that morphine is the best means to alleviate severe and otherwise intractable pain. This claim seems to be true; but clearly it is true only relative to a context. For those people who live in times or cultures where morphine is not readily available or is not available at all, it is not true that the best remedy for severe pain is

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morphine. And even in those contemporary communities where morphine for medical purposes is readily available, the claim that morphine is the best means for the alleviation of severe, otherwise intractable pain is true only in general. There are some patients who respond better to alternative treatments for pain, such as hypnosis and meditation; and there are some patients who cannot so much as tolerate morphine because for them it depresses oxygen in the body to dangerous levels. Obviously, for them, morphine is not the best means of alleviating pain.

Analogously, if we are thinking in the abstract about the problem of the human post-Fall condition, orthodox Christian theology might well hold that in the abstract the best means to heal that condition is the atonement of Christ. But it would not follow that the atonement of Christ is necessary simpliciter for a perfectly good God. The judgement about the goodness of the means is relative to a great number of factors that are themselves contingent or dependent on the choices of human beings. If human history had developed differently, or if human beings had succeeded in altering radically their own psychology through the use of drugs or other psychic manipulation, if Martians had come to earth and dispersed all human beings then living on earth to Mars, and so on and on, in a list of contingencies limited only by one's imagination, then it might not have been the case that the atonement of Christ was the best means for achieving human salvation.

So the claim that Christ's atonement is the best means or the most fitting means to salvation is relative to a context. For that reason, it is also compatible with the claim that the atonement of Christ was not necessary simpliciter for God. And with respect to both these claims, the Marian interpretation and the Thomistic interpretation are in agreement.

For all these reasons, the Marian interpretation is a development of the Thomistic interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement; it does not disagree with Aquinas's claims but it supplements them with further exploration of the connection between the giving of grace and the passion and death of Christ.

### Response to Kathryn Pogin

In her article, Kathryn Pogin begins by recommending Abelardian interpretations of the doctrine of the atonement, which I rejected, and then arguing for the importance of social concerns both in human redemption and in interpretations of the doctrine of the atonement. Pogin's remarks are based on ethical and political views with which I am largely in agreement, but the concern she bases on those views is one that would take considerable work to examine – work which, in my view, is at best incomplete in the discipline and which, even if available, would lie well outside my areas of expertise. Nonetheless, her concern is most definitely worth calling attention to, and I will here do what I can to respond to it.

Let me begin that response with two small points where I disagree with her.

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The first point has to do with her recommendation of Abelardian interpretations of the doctrine of the atonement. Whatever Abelard's own views actually were, Abelardian interpretations are generally understood to claim that Christ's passion and death are instrumental to human salvation *only* as an example of the way in which human beings ought to live their lives. On this interpretation of the doctrine, then, the problem for post-Fall human beings lies only in the intellect, which lacks knowledge of the right road for human life. This is an interpretation of the doctrine which I take to be unacceptable both because the claim that the source of human evil is only in the intellect seems obviously contrary to other central Christian doctrines and also because it seems so obviously false. What ails post-Fall human beings is not only or even primarily that they do not know what the good is; rather, the primary and most difficult problem is that they do not want it.

And the second point has to do with Pogin's concern that an admiring focus on Christ's passion and death can enable passivity in the face of wrongdoing, if not actually a self-congratulatory conniving with it. As I explained the Marian account in *Atonement*, the concept of love is central to the account; and love requires two mutually governing, interconnected desires: a desire for the good of the beloved, and a desire for union with the beloved. I also argued for the claim that being a doer of injustice is a bad thing for the doer. In his last days, reflecting on his life as the commandant of Treblinka, Franz Stangl thought that it would have been better for him if he had died before he accepted that job.[14] I concur with his view. For these reasons, love can require the resistance of injustice, when resisting is the best way to help the doer of injustice to cease his injustice.

In fact, when the evil is great and resistance to it would be inefficacious without violence, then treating the evildoer with violence can also be an act of love, even a morally required act of love. It should be noted in this connection that Christ drove the moneychangers out of the Temple with a whip of small cords. Chasing people and flogging them with a whip is an act of violence; but since on Christian doctrine Christ is perfectly righteous and righteousness requires love, this act of Christ's has to be accounted a morally mandated act of love also.

It matters to me here to make clear that I do not mean with these remarks to be rejecting pacifism. Whether war is ever justified is a complicated matter, and it depends in part on the weapons currently employed in war. It may be that, even given the emphasis on love in the Marian account, there is no evil so great that it justifies the use of some weapons – nuclear weapons, for example.

So my point here is not about just war theory or pacifism. My point is only the small one, that not only is love compatible even with violence in the resistance of injustice but that in fact in some circumstances love may require such resistance to the evildoer. And these are claims entailed by the Marian account of the atonement. Therefore, nothing in the Marian account can give any support to those who would like to justify cowardly or self-serving enabling of evil by pointing to Christ's atonement.

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With these relatively small points of disagreement set aside, let me turn to what I think is Pogin's main concern, where I am in sympathy with her. She is concerned that the Marian account leaves communities largely out of the explanation of Christ's atonement.

Here too there is a small matter that I would like to set aside first. As Pogin sees it, communities can be responsible for the sins of individual human beings because people in those communities are enculturated into accepting bad acts as morally permissible or even good, or because the badness of the culture in those communities obscures for people the badness in their own beliefs and acts. Here I agree with her entirely; but insofar as an explanation of the generation of moral badness was not part of my project, this point is not germane to that project.

What is definitely relevant to the Marian account is Pogin's view that human communities themselves can be guilty of an evil and that a community as a whole can be ashamed or should be ashamed of what it has done. Consider, for example, England in the period when it insisted on taking the slave trade to be legal. It seems to be England as a whole, the community which is the nation, that is guilty of this evil. Or think about Eastern European countries in the period when they made anti-Semitism respectable in their cultures. It seems to be these countries, the communities taken as a whole, that have something to be ashamed of in this history. Insofar as Christ's atonement is meant to remove human guilt and shame, Pogin has a point that such social evil should also be addressed in a complete interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement.

It is of course the case that even in a bad society a human person can flourish in righteousness or rise above the shamefulness of the society as a whole. Think, for example, of Sojourner Truth. And it is also the case that union in love has to be between individuals, even if it is also between whole communities. It may be, for example, that the whole church is the bride of Christ, as Christian doctrine has it; but that doctrine would have nothing attractive about it if it were not also part of the doctrine that the union between Christ and the church is emergent from the union between Christ and each individual in the church.

Nonetheless, even if the foundational work of the atonement and the flourishing it enables has to be between Christ and individual human beings, Pogin seems to me right that there can remain problems of guilt and shame for a community taken as a whole. Consider the instances of racism Pogin highlights. It is not enough to say that just those people who engage in racist acts have something to be guilty of and to be ashamed about. However hard it may be to explain and understand, it also seems true that the nation as a whole, in virtue of containing such racist injustice towards the vulnerable, has something it is guilty of, something for which it should be ashamed. Or think about the point from its mirror image. It seems clear that a whole nation can be morally praiseworthy. When the refugees came through the Munich train station 10,000 a day, and the efforts of the whole nation were bent on caring for them generously, then Germany was worthy of

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admiration. It was not just the individual Germans who participated in the care for the refugees who were admirable and honourable. It was the nation. Those watching the events unfold saw that, among the nations of the West, it was Germany – the nation as a whole – that was morally exemplary.

And so on this score I want to concede Pogin's point: any account of the atonement will be more complete if it can say something suitable about the guilt and shame of communities as well as individuals.

It is also worth noting in this connection that, although contemporary analytic philosophy often focuses on major philosophical issues only with regard to individuals, there is in fact a strong strand of religious tradition in the West that privileges the social and the communal in philosophical theology.

Consider, for example, the theodicy of Saadia Gaon.[15] In his theodicy, he begins with the assumption that there is a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good and who cares about all his creatures. Since Saadia is unwilling to sustain belief in such a God by denying the plain fact of innocent suffering in the world, he also assumes that there must be a morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering. Because Saadia starts with these assumptions, his theodicy takes the shape it does.

But how would someone come to know or be justified in believing the assumptions with which Saadia starts? Answers that have been given by philosophers include reason, as when someone takes himself to have a proof for the existence of such a God, and religious experience, as when someone supposes that her experiences have given her the religious analogue of perception of God. Though he recognizes that there are people who will reject his assumptions and mock his theodicy, Saadia himself points to both reason and experience to support his assumptions. In Saadia's view, mockers who reject his assumptions and his theodicy differ from Jews in reason and experience. But the reason and experience Saadia points to are communal, not individual. It is the failure of the mockers to experience what 'we' have experienced or to believe what 'we' have believed in consequence of those experiences that makes the mockers frame the argument from evil in the way they do. The experiences Saadia discusses in this connection are not his own or any other individual's isolated religious experiences but rather the experiences of the whole community, for example, in God's parting the sea for the Jews in the exodus from Egypt; and the reasoned beliefs on which Saadia relies are those about which, as he says in one phrase or another, 'our nation is in complete agreement'.[16] So Saadia supposes that justification for a belief can come, at least in part, from the experiences and epistemic commitments of a whole people. In weighing reasons and evidence for one belief or another, on Saadia's view, it is permissible or even imperative to avail oneself of communal experience and communal philosophical or theological expertise.

So there is not only a point in considering the connection between Christ's atonement and the guilt and shame of whole communities, but there is also a

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precedent for philosophical focus on communities in some strands of Judaeo-Christian philosophical theology.

Further than this, however, I cannot go. To examine ways in which Christ's atonement might remove the guilt and shame of whole communities, we would need much more comprehension than I think we currently have about what it is for a community as a whole to have guilt and shame. Although there have been some helpful investigations related to these issues, in my view it would take more work in political philosophy or in the metaphysics of groups for such issues in philosophical theology to be pursued profitably.

So while I think it would be good for interpretations of the doctrine of the atonement to consider communal guilt and shame, it does not look easy to do so, in my view. And, of course, in defence of the Marian account it should also be said that in the history of interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement, no major interpretation has addressed this issue.

## Conclusion

The three articles by Pawl, Jeffrey, and Pogin raise stimulating questions with clarity and care; and I am grateful to have had the benefit of their concerns, which have allowed me to clarify things that matter to me as well as to them. In this short article, I am unable to do justice to all the questions that concern them, but I appreciate this opportunity to focus on some of the issues they raise and to add some further postscripts to the Marian account of the atonement.[17]

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## NOTES

1. In fact, this is my second opportunity to do so. For my response to an earlier set of comments on the book, see Stump (2019).
2. Stump (2018), 346.
3. Stump (2010), ch. 14.

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4. For a defence of this position, see Stump (2003), ch. 2.
5. But Pawl herself has done excellent work attempting to answer this question. See, for example, Pawl (2016) and Pawl (2018).
6. *Summa theologiae* [henceforth 'ST'], III q.48 a.1.
7. ST III q.46 a.2 ad 3.
8. ST III q.46 a.2.
9. ST III 46.3.
10. ST III 46 a.3.
11. See his commentary on John 14: 4–7 in *Lectura super Ioannem* (Lectures on the Gospel of John), ch. 2, lectura 2.
12. ST III q.46 a.2.
13. See, for example, ST III q.1 a.2.
14. See, for example, Sereny (1983), 364.
15. I have discussed Saadia's theodicy in detail in Stump (1997). The following descriptions of Saadia's view are taken from that article.
16. Saadia (1948), 264.
17. I am grateful to Faith Pawl, Anne Jeffrey, and Kathryn Pogin for comments on an earlier draft of this article.

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