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Existential suffering and hopeful theodicy in Esaias Tegnér's *Spleen*

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Poetry can contribute to theological and philosophical reflection. In this paper, we concentrate our attention on Esaias Tegnér's poignant depiction of melancholy, or what we call "existential suffering" in his poem *Spleen*. We argue the poem can be interpreted as showing that the distinction between theoretical and existential problems of suffering is less clear-cut than often presupposed and that theorizing about the meaning of suffering *can* have a role to play even when people are experiencing great existential suffering and despair. Based on the speaker's existential struggles in *Spleen*, we also formulate the novel concept of a *hopeful theodicy*, a concept we think can be of use more broadly in future research on problems of suffering and theodicy.

Introduction

For many years the Swedish poet and bishop Esaias Tegnér (1782–1846) was among those authors who enjoyed an almost canonical status in the teaching of Swedish literature in Swedish secondary schools.¹ Today his works are less well known, at least outside specialist circles, and beyond Sweden it would be a rare thing indeed to come across his works at all.² Like several other Swedish bishops in the first half of the nineteenth century, Tegnér had not received a primarily theological education, although he had extensive theological knowledge; he was a professor of Greek in Lund and was already a great cultural figure by the time he was made Bishop of Växjö in 1824. The romantic and Christianized Neoplatonism that was common in his time arguably influenced his theological thinking and philosophy of religion.³

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During his life Tegnér occasionally suffered from mental health problems. Tegnér's poetry includes works that deal with spiritual suffering and the meaninglessness and existential despair that sometimes accompany mental suffering. Although these poems are not necessarily strictly autobiographical, it is reasonable to assume that they originate in Tegnér's own experiences.⁴ The most famous of these "illness poems" is *Spleen* (in Swedish: *Mjältsjukan*).

The purpose of this paper is to use the poignant depiction of suffering by the speaker in the poem in *Spleen* to show that the distinction between theoretical and existential problems of suffering is less clear-cut than often presupposed in the literature and that arguments about the meaning of suffering *can* have a role to play even when people are experiencing great existential suffering and despair.⁵ Such arguments do not, however, amount to theodicies in the sense of correct explanations of why God allows suffering of this kind. Rather, in Tegnér's poem we see that explanations and theoretical arguments have the *potential* to kindle a hope, a hope that "perhaps" there is an explanation as well as a hope, which in the best case can provide some comfort. Throughout the paper, we contrast the representation of existential suffering in *Spleen* with the suffering of Job from the Book of Job.

We begin, in section two, by describing what we mean by existential problems of suffering, using the suffering of Job as a paradigmatic example. In section three, we then present Tegnér's *Spleen* in its entirety and comment on the sort of struggles the speaker in the poem portrays. In section four, we emphasize that despite what often has been thought, the poem is not altogether an expression of pessimism with respect to the overall meaning of life as well as the existence of God, but rather ends with a glimpse of hope. Thus, in section five, we formulate the novel concept of a *hopeful theodicy*, a concept we think explains the hope presented in Tegnér's poem. Finally, in section six, we conclude that although theodic reflections are often seen as a part of the theoretical problem of evil, such reflections can have a role to play even with respect to existential problems.

Existential problems

A well-known example of what might be called existential suffering is found in the Book of Job. It describes how God permits Satan to test Job's trust in God. Satan kills cattle and people around Job, including Job's own children, and finally smites Job himself with sore boils. The pain inflicted on Job is devastating to say the least. The loss of cattle

and servants reduces Job from wealth to poverty. The death of his children leads to intense agony and heart-breaking grief. The sore boils not only involve an external suffering of physical pain, but also lead to an inward kind of suffering of feeling repulsed by one's own body.⁶ Apart from that, there is also the social shunning Job endures when inflicted with boils. However, it is not the individual instances of pain Job undergoes that amounts to Job's existential suffering, but rather the mental or physical trauma stemming from the accumulation of all the suffering.⁷ At one point Job even cries out:

Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest [...] Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants which never saw light.⁸

In light of Job's suffering, some contemporary readers tend to think that the painful struggles of Job raise a theoretical problem of evil. Paradigmatically, theoretical problems of evil are problems about how seemingly gratuitous suffering⁹ does not seem to be reconcilable with the very existence of God.¹⁰ Moreover, such problems are also abstract problems brought up and dealt with from a third person perspective, so to speak. However, Job himself does not raise a theoretical problem. At least not in its standard form. Despite his intense physical and existential suffering, Job never questions the very existence of God. Indeed, he actually longs back to the time he was in God's presence:

Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shone upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness.¹¹

Instead, Job's problem is primarily an existential one and as such it is more practical than theoretical. Existential problems arise from the misfortune of an individual and are dealt with from the first person perspective, the person to whom the problem also belongs. More precisely, existential problems are so intense so that from the sufferer's perspective, their whole life seems to lack positive meaning.¹² Conversely, one can see that the problem is more practical than theoretical because the primary concern for the individual is how to handle the existential

suffering in question, not to explain it by, for example, trying to see it as consistent with a particular worldview.

In Job's case, the existential problem is also a religious problem. Not only is Job subject to swift and shocking change consisting of the change from wellbeing to intense existential suffering where he interprets his whole life as meaningless. There is also the shift from a life in God's presence or in a relationship with God to a broken God-relationship and a life where God, from the perspective of Job, even seems to unjustly punish Job. Hence, Job is not only in despair, but also angry with God and protests against Him.¹³

Now, theodicies in fact play a part in the book of Job. However, Job's friends – who primarily arrive to comfort Job – formulate them. Here the discussions take a rather peculiar turn. Job's friends converse with Job, but they speak in an abstract way, not really taking account of Job's own suffering. Some have interpreted the conversation in an anti-theodic manner, suggesting that theodicies are a part of the theoretical problem of evil and that the friends who formulate them are emotionally detached and morally insensitive.¹⁴ We will not make a judgment on this criticism here, but only note that in so far as anti-theodicy is defined as a meta-criticism of the whole idea of formulating theodicies,¹⁵ this is not (we think) the criticism that appears in the conversation between Job and his friends. Rather, Job does not accept the theodicies put forward because they do not fit his own story and existential struggles.

Moreover, having primarily a religious and existential problem, what torments Job is not really a lack of theodicy, but rather a lack of response from God. This is why he in the end turns away from his friends' intellectual theorizing and instead turns directly to God.¹⁶

Nevertheless, there are of course other examples of existential suffering where life as a whole is perceived as meaningless. And since such suffering is experienced by individuals in specific circumstances, no case is identical to another. However, we want to emphasize our main aim with this paper, namely that of showing that the distinction between existential and theoretical problems is not always as clear-cut as we for example have described it here. Indeed, an interesting example of existential suffering where this is illustrated and where in particular theoretical and theodic explanations for why God allows suffering play a slightly different role than in the case of Job (where the explanations are rejected out of hand) can be found in Tegnér's touching poem *Spleen*.

Tegnér's poem Spleen

The Swedish title of Tegnér's poem is "Mjältsjukan," which in nineteenth-century Swedish was a term for melancholy and existential despair. The word was related to what we now call "depression," but has a wider existential meaning. In the English translation, the title has been translated to *Spleen* and we use that term in our discussion. It should be noted, however, that the poem's Swedish title refers to a state of mind that in English could also be described as a state of deep melancholy.

Nevertheless, Tegnér is not alone in addressing this subject in his poetry. It is a theme that is found among several of his literary contemporaries, including the Swedish poet Carl Gustaf af Leopold (1756–1829) and John Keats (1795–1821).¹⁷ Keat's *Ode on Melancholy* is perhaps one of the most interesting parallels in the English-speaking context. As does Tegnér, Keats points to the inevitability of suffering in human life, and Tegnér would fully agree with Keats that "... in the very temple of Delight / Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine." But Keats' poem also gives a kind of recommendation on how to cope with Melancholy: "glut thy sorrow on a morning rose." Tegnér's *Spleen* points, as we shall see, to a gloomier attitude – a vague hope for deliverance in the afterlife. It is also widely accepted in Tegnér scholarship that his late poem *Resminnen* (Memories of a Travel) was written after Tegnér, during a severe period of mental illness, had read lord Byron's poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.¹⁸ As such, *Spleen* as a poem is part of a wider cultural context dealing with melancholy, tragedy and in some respects existential suffering.

The subject matter of *Spleen* is a suffering which – although it can be partly explained by Tegnér's own illness – is of a much deeper nature, but which also differs somewhat from the suffering described in the Book of Job.¹⁹ For these reasons it is interesting to reflect on what the poem has to say about existential suffering as a theological and religio-philosophical problem. Since Tegnér's poetry is fairly unknown outside Scandinavia, we provide a full English translation of the text below.²⁰

I stood where my life's slopes had reached their summit,
Where watercourses strain and would untwine
And with their foaming wave would downwards plummet;
There it was clear, and standing there was fine.

I gazed towards the sun and all its planets
Which, after setting, in the sky did shine;
I looked down at the earth, so green and fair,
And God was good and man was honest there.

An evil spleen-filled elf appeared, who merely
Bit without warning deep into my heart;
Lo, all at once the world was void and dreary,
And sun and stars quite suddenly went dark;
My once gay landscape lay autumnal, weary,
Each grove grew dun, each flower stem broke apart,
All vigour died within my frozen mind,
All joy, all courage shrivelled up and pined.

What's it to me, reality's dead matter,
So dull, oppressive and so coarsely raw?
How hope's once rosy hue has, ah, grown flatter!
How memory once blue, ah, clouded o'er!
And poetry itself! Its idle patter,
Its tight-rope saltos I would have no more.
Its vain illusions none can satisfy,
But skimmed from surfaces of things nearby.

For you, mankind, I should be praises saying,
You in God's image made, how apt, how true!
Two lies though you are guilty of displaying,
Woman is one and, by her, man makes two.
Of faith and honour the old song needs praying,
Best sung when we deception would pursue.
You heaven's child! What's true, I would maintain,
Is, branded on your brow, the mark of Cain!

So legible a mark, writ by God's finger,
Why did I fail to notice such a sign?
Through human life a corpse-like stench does linger
Which poisons spring's air, summer's pomp maligns.
That smell comes from the grave and seeks to injure;
Graves are walled up, by marble guarded fine.
Alas, though, foul decay is on life's breath,
No guard shuts out its constant reek of death.

Tell me, you watchman, how the night progresses!
Is it unceasing, will it never end?
The moon, half-eaten, through the sky's still presses,
The tearful stars still through the heavens wend.
My pulse beats fast as in my youth's successes,
Hours of affliction though it cannot mend.
Each pulse beat's pain, how endless and how raw!
Oh, my poor heart, devoured and bleeding sore!
My heart? Within my breast I none discover,
'Tis but an urn wherein life's ashes lie.
Show pity on me, Hertha, you green mother,
Oh, let that urn be buried by and by;
In air earth's pain erodes but still will smother,
In earth, though, surely it must cease its cry,
Perhaps time's orphan, when earth's school is done,
Will see its father – far beyond the sun.²¹

It is interesting to note the shift that takes place between the beginning and end of the poem. At the beginning and particularly in the first stanza, reality and the experience of life are described as something positive, and faith in both God and man as positive and self-evident. The introduction can therefore be seen as representing an approach to life that is perceived as existentially meaningful, and although the text describes this state of experiencing meaning in flowery poetic language, it is an expression of a state of self-evident meaningfulness that inspires the everyday lives of many people, whether they have some faith in God or not. Life is "clear" and "standing there was fine." However, we take it that Tegnér himself has a more Christian and Platonic understanding in mind and implicitly expresses his conviction that everything that is good and beautiful participates in the divine life. Moreover, when the speaker gazes at the sun and the planets, and concludes that life is good, the words "sun" and "life" allow Tegnér's Christian Platonism to shine through. Indeed, elsewhere Tegnér more explicitly develops similar conventional Platonic ideas of the pre-existent human soul longing for a return to its heavenly homeland where "sun" is an obvious metaphor for God.²²

From the second stanza on, the mood changes. The vision of a correspondence between heaven and earth is lost. The "evil elf," or black elf – a malevolent mythological creature – seizes the heart of the speaker and his experience of life changes. Suddenly everything becomes meaningless in a way that causes pain. The poem can be said to describe the experience of existential suffering caused by a profound sense of

meaninglessness. What causes this sense of meaninglessness is in this context less important. In Tegnér's case it could be mental illness, although some biographers have suggested that his depression was caused by the experience of unrequited love.²³ Theologically, it can be seen as a loss of the vision of the relation between the heavenly homeland and its bleak image, the earth. Whatever the cause, it is clear that *Spleen* describes existential suffering in the sense that life as a whole is perceived as meaningless.

The black elf's attack is not explained. With no explanation at hand, the speaker's feeling of hope and confidence fades away, trust in other people is shattered and the feeling of meaninglessness becomes so intense that death, as in the case of Job who regretted being born, is seen as a release from the predicament. Understanding the reference in the seventh stanza to the urn "wherein life's ashes lie" as an allusion to suicide would be stretching the interpretation too far, however. A more reasonable reading is that it is *life* that is dead and should be buried in the earth – described as an earth goddess, Hertha.

Tegnér's imagery and the literary conventions of the time can make *Spleen* hard to appreciate for a contemporary reader. Yet, if we put a little effort into understanding the existential experience expressed by the poem's speaker, the text comes across as a heart-rending cry born of deep existential anguish. Existence has been reduced to "but an urn wherein life's ashes lie." Great human suffering can take many forms and have as many causes, but when it affects a person's sense of life's meaningfulness, describing life as "ashes" is an apt metaphor. As long as we can experience suffering as meaningful, for example by sensing that God has a good intention behind our suffering, life has not been reduced to ashes. The question is whether there is any help to be found in a radical state of existential suffering when we can no longer experience any meaning.

From despair to a hopeful "perhaps"

How, then, can a reading of Tegnér's poem contribute to a theological and a more theoretical religio-philosophical discussion of existential suffering and the possible meaning of suffering? We suggest that the answer to this question can be found when considering how the speaker of *Spleen* moves from despair to hope.

In the first stanza, the speaker's relationship to God is self-evident and life is meaningful. The speaker has not yet ended up in a situation of existential suffering. When the evil elf appears, his unquestioned faith

in God and trust in life collapse and are buried in an “urn wherein life’s ashes lie.” The poem is often read as an expression of radical pessimism. But at the end of the text there is a kind of character-forming and sceptical theodicy that is intimately connected with Tegnér’s Platonically influenced theology.

The poem’s speaker wonders whether “time’s orphan, when earth’s school is done,” will in time see God, “his Father – beyond the sun.”²⁴ The suffering the speaker describes so touchingly eventually elicits an attempt to interpret the suffering in a way that makes it meaningful.

The speaker’s despair leads to a philosophical question about the meaning of suffering and its relationship to God. But in the poem this encounter does not lead to a restoration of the previously carefree experience of meaningfulness. Neither is learning something or forming a character in earth’s school, without a relationship with God, in order to find the way back to God, or the divine homeland, a theodicy in the classical sense. It should not be understood as a correct explanation. Instead, a more tentative question arises that seems to involve a somewhat sceptical attitude.²⁵ The initial theological optimism is simply unable to withstand the assault of the black elf, but towards the end of the poem, the speaker has nevertheless seen a shadow or vague image of something that could be an explanation and perhaps imagined a God beyond the darkness, in the light of which life as a whole “perhaps” could be meaningful again. The poem thus ends with tendencies to hope rather than in sheer despair.

Theoretical reflections and the concept of a hopeful theodicy

It thus seems that theoretical reflection has, or rather may have, a role to play even when a person is faced with existential problems of suffering. However, it is interesting to see when this reflection takes place and to draw a comparison with Job.

When Job has been tormented to such extremes that he feels that life as a whole is meaningless and regrets being born, reflections on the meaning of suffering are not the first thing that are presented. Instead, Job’s friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar come to demonstrate in silence their grief at Job’s suffering:

And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven

nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.²⁶

Only after the grief, or after the initial grief, are the reflections made, even though Job does not accept the theodicies proposed.

In *Spleen* there are no friends who grieve with the speaker, but the theoretical reflections are not made until the end of the poem and not immediately. The first reaction to suffering is grief and despair, and not reflection and attempts to find explanations and meaning.

It is also interesting to see what kind of explanation finally emerges in Tegnér's poem. It is neither a theodicy in the sense of a correct explanation, nor a *defence* in the sense of a merely logical possibility that is put forward.²⁷ Rather, it is something in between. Indeed, we think that exactly here *Spleen* can help us develop a concept that is also useful for theoretical work on the problem of evil. In order to capture the kind of explanation the speaker seems to put forward, we suggest the concept of a *hopeful theodicy*. This concept can be explicated by drawing a distinction between two emotional states that we have found to be prevalent in *Spleen*, namely *despair* and *hope*. Recently, Carl-Johan Palmqvist has used Williams James's term *live possibility* to explain this distinction. A person who is in despair thinks that the possibility of meaning in life, for example, is negligible, while someone who hopes sees that there is a live possibility of a meaning to life that is not negligible, but which may not be all that likely either.²⁸ Perhaps there is no precise or universal threshold for when despair turns to hope, but it seems as if the speaker in *Spleen*, with the help of a theoretical explanation, moves past that threshold. The metaphor of time's orphan in the last stanza is also illuminating. The orphan (one might think) is lost and in despair throughout most of the poem. However, towards the end and after some reflection, there is at least some hope that God and the divine homeland could be found beyond the sun in a life to come.²⁹

We want to emphasize that the point here is not to elaborate on the specifics of the explanation put forward by the speaker in *Spleen* and how it differs from for example traditional soul-making theodicies, but rather to show that the speaker actually reflects on the meaning of his existential suffering and provides an explanation worthy of some hope rather than despair.

Moreover, the concept of a *hopeful theodicy* is also distinguishable from Peter van Inwagen's definition of a "defence." Van Inwagen defines a defence as "a story according to which God and suffering of the sort

contained in the world both exist, and which is such that (given the existence of God) there is no reason to think it false."³⁰ In a similar terminology, a "hopeful theodicy" would be a story according to which God and (existential) suffering both exist, and even though there might be some reason to think it is likely false, the likelihood of it being true is still sufficient to kindle hope rather than despair.³¹

There is thus something important in the poem's "perhaps," which admittedly stresses that man's cognitive ability in relation to the divine – or to the meaning of existence more broadly – is after all limited, but which at the same time expresses the notion that theology and philosophy of religion can provide possible and theoretically elaborated approaches to existential suffering. As human beings, however, we do not have access to an obvious divine revelation that enables us to actually know what the meaning of suffering is (if there is a meaning).

For want of more comprehensive knowledge of a divine reality, theology and philosophy of religion have to make do with the sceptical but still positive "perhaps" that marks the theological and religio-philosophical conclusion of *Spleen*.

Concluding reflections

Existential problems thus relate to suffering which causes an individual to see life as a whole as meaningless. For Job, this problem arises from physical afflictions. In *Spleen*, it arises rather from mental suffering in a more direct sense. While we have emphasized the first-person perspective and that the problem is therefore experienced differently by different people, there are cases where theoretical reflection can play a certain role even when people are experiencing existential suffering. That said, it would of course be inappropriate and insensitive to suggest explanations when they are not asked for. Place must be given to grief before theoretical reflection.

While Job rejects the explanations which his friends suggest after a week of silence, we see Tegnér's speaker reflecting in the poem's last stanza on a character-forming, sceptical but nonetheless hopeful theodicy. The explanation given by the speaker of the poem is not a theodicy in the sense of a correct explanation, nor is it a defence in the sense of only a logically possible explanation. In Tegnér's poem, as we interpret it, the explanation is instead presented as a real possibility or as a "perhaps." This "perhaps" is also intimately connected with Tegnér's Platonically influenced theology. It is an expression based in a lost vision of God, which the speaker, by living in "earth's school," obtains

some hope of regaining. While Job finally gets to see God in all his power and realizes that there must be an explanation for the physical and existential suffering he has endured, *Spleen* instead ends with an uncertain hope of seeing God “beyond the sun.” Whether Tegnér’s speaker finally meets God and again sees life as meaningful in the light of God’s presence is not revealed to us. But his theoretical and theodic reflections can at least kindle hope for a future relationship such as this in a life to come.

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Notes

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2. Only a few of Tegnér’s poems have been translated. For some examples, see Longfellow, *Poets and Poetry*.
3. Hidal, *Tegnér och kristendomen*, 50–4. That Tegnér’s philosophy and theology can be described as inspired by Platonism has been accepted by Tegnér scholars at least since Nathan Söderblom wrote his article “Tegnér och religionen”. Tegnér’s Platonism is, as Söderblom argues, not especially original. One of its basic tenets is the conviction that life on earth is basically a prison for the human soul, whose rightful home is beyond time, with God. Death is therefore, according to Tegnér, the principal road to salvation. Another central tenet in Tegnér’s Platonism is the positive view that everything good and beautiful – including human life – participates in the absolute Good and Beautiful. See Söderblom, “Tegnér och religionen,” 135–6. For a general discussion of Romanticism and Platonism, see Hampton, *Romanticism and the Re-invention*. An eclectic Christian Platonism is an important feature in Tegnér’s thinking.
4. Svensson, *Diktaren på dårhuset*, 12.
5. See, for example, Plantinga, “Epistemic Probability and Evil,” 69 and Andrew Gleeson’s distinction between “the academic problem of evil” and “the existential problem of evil” in Gleeson, “God and Evil.” For criticism of this distinction, see Nagasawa’s response to Gleeson in Nagasawa, “Response to Gleeson,” 192–4.
6. Eleonore Stump describes it well as “the additional psychic distress of finding one’s own body a disgusting, hostile stranger, instead of one’s home, to which and in which one belongs.” See Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 182.

7. However, the same kind of trauma and feeling of meaninglessness can certainly be a consequence of individual instances of suffering as well.
8. Job 3:11-16. We use the King James Bible translation solely for aesthetic reasons. This translation fits well with Tegnér's poetic language.
9. "Gratuitous suffering" is suffering which is not necessary for the realization of a greater (outweighing) good. For a more detailed discussion of the term see, for example, Kraay, "God and Gratuitous Evil."
10. Here we use the term *reconcilable* in a broad sense. So-called theoretical problems of evil can be formulated both in terms of logical consistency ("the logical problem of evil") and in terms of the evidential value of evil ("the evidential problem of evil"). When we use the word *reconcilable* we have both problems in mind, but the distinction is nevertheless not crucial to what we say in this paper.
11. Job 29:2-3.
12. See Adams and Adams, "Introduction," 1.
13. See, for example, Job 10:2-3.
14. See discussion in Dahl, *The Problem of Job*, 51–4.
15. See Betenson, "Anti-theodicy."
16. Dahl, *The Problem of Job*, 50.
17. Svensson, *Diktaren på dårhuset*, 91–2. The influence of English poetry and thinking on Tegnér should not be exaggerated however. Poetically, he was first and foremost a classicist in style, and as for most Swedish churchmen and theologians of his day, German theology was the primary dialogue partner. See e.g. Wärendh, *Tegnér och teologien*, 22.
18. Svensson, *Diktaren på dårhuset*, 171–6.
19. Job's existential suffering stems more from physical rather than mental affliction.
20. We are deeply grateful to the translator, Dr John Irons, for his kind permission to quote his translation of Tegnér's poem in full.
21. The Swedish text is available at Projekt Runeberg, <http://runeberg.org/tegnér/061.html> [accessed September 23, 2021]. The translation by John Irons can be found at <http://johnirons.blogspot.com/2018/11/esaías-tegnér-mjaltstjukan-spleen.html> [accessed January 25, 2022].
22. In one of his most famous poems – *The Children of the Lord's Supper* – this metaphor is quite explicit:

Son of Eternity, fettered in Time, and an exile, the spiritTugs at his chains evermore, and struggles like flames ever upward. Still he recalls with emotion his Father's manifold mansions, Thinks of the land of his fathers, where blossomed more freshly the flowers, Shone a more beautiful sun, and he played with the winged angels.

The poem is quoted from Longfellow, *Poets and Poetry*, 166. Moreover, Tegnér interpreter Sten Hidal suggests, in a remark on this poem, that a recurrent theme in Tegnér's thinking is that earth mirrors – albeit in an imperfect way – heaven. Salvation, then, consists in remembering heaven as one's true homeland and returning to the divine sun. See Hidal, *Tegnér och kristendomen*, 54.

23. Svensson, *Diktaren på dårhuset*, 86.
24. Some scholars claim that Tegnér's use of the metaphor *orphan* comes from his reading of Fichte's *Die Anweisung zum seeligen Leben oder auch die Religionslehre* (1806). Fichte

- writes about the “Abkömmling der Ewigkeit” (the descendant of eternity). See e.g. Svensson, *Diktaren på dårhuset*, 97.
25. However, the response put forward is distinguishable from the popular response called sceptical theism. A sceptical theist would not offer an explanation for the meaning of suffering at all (neither for the meaning of life in the light of existential suffering), but would add that it would not be surprising if there was an explanation. The speaker in *Spleen* puts forward an explanation, but remains sceptical (or even thinks it is quite unlikely) that it is a correct explanation (see section 5 about a “hopeful theodicy”).
 26. Job 2:12–13.
 27. The distinction between “defence” and “theodicy” was introduced by Alvin Plantinga in Plantinga, *God Freedom and Evil*.
 28. Palmqvist, “Analysing Hope.”
 29. We want to emphasize that we are not claiming that the sort of sceptical yet hopeful theorizing that we see in *Spleen* is always appropriate no matter what the circumstance is. Moreover, whether or not “hopeful theodicy”, regardless of its modest nature, is subject to moral anti-theodic arguments is an open question worthy of further investigation. For a comprehensive overview of morally motivated anti-theodic arguments, see Betenson, “Anti-theodicy”. We are grateful to N.N. Trakakis for raising this issue.
 30. See Van Inwagen, “The Problem of Evil,” 156.
 31. However, in relation to van Inwagen’s definition, the term *hopeful defence*, rather than *hopeful theodicy*, might be more adequate. Moreover, our concept of a *hopeful theodicy* is distinguishable from less ambitious definitions than Plantinga’s definition of a theodicy. That is to say, not only is it distinct from a theodicy described as a true explanation, but it is also distinct from a theodicy defined as a probably true explanation, or even a not unlikely explanation. Richard Swinburne, for example, seems to understand a theodicy as a probable explanation of evil. See Swinburne, *Providence*, 15–17. See also comments by Søvik, *The Problem of Evil*, 25.

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