

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: THE COMPATIBILITY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
AND THE CO-EXISTENCE OF GOD AND EVIL

By

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Abstract of the Dissertation

The Problem of Evil: The Compatibility of Christian Doctrine and the Co-existence of God and Evil

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This dissertation explores the theological/philosophical problem of evil by asking several questions. 1) What is evil—how does one define the word “evil?” 2) How does evil arise? 3) How might one find sense of meaning and hope in the face of one’s experience of evil and suffering? 4) How can one reconcile one’s experience of evil with one’s understanding of God and the Holy Scripture?

Since this problem is particularly perplexing to those who hold monotheistic worldviews, this dissertation is based on the assumption of monotheism. I argue that one’s solution to the problem of evil is integrally related to two subjective issues: The prioritization that one assigns to various possible authorities (such as global evidence, sacred evidence, and personal experience); and the speculative worldview that one employs.

Contemporary Theodicies and defenses are derived from the Augustinian and Irenaean traditions. I discuss the most well known and accepted theodicies and defenses employed by theists and the corresponding responses from atheists, in my attempt to reveal their strengths and weaknesses as they propose

to answer the age old problem of the coexistence of a wholly good God and evidential evil in our world.

In closing I offer my own speculations with regard to the religious problem of evil. It is accepted in the philosophical arena that the effect that evil and suffering has on people is best addressed by the pastoral counselor. I address this topic to show that, although this is an area best addressed by the pastoral counselor, there is also a connection and usefulness for the pastoral counselor to be knowledgeable concerning the issues in the theological/philosophical debate as it concerns the problem of evil.

Chapter One: Discussing the Problem of Evil

The Problem of Evil

The problem of evil is an old one and was thought to be expressed first by Epicurus before the time of Christ, but was expanded upon by Lactantius, Marcion, Boethius, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Evil is a problem when we seek to explain why it exists and what its relationship is to the world as a whole. The Bible proclaims the existence of a good, all powerful God; it also witnesses to the existence of evil. Non-biblical responses to the existence of evil deny one or more of these biblical premises; therefore, they cannot provide answers that are acceptable to those who believe. Non-biblical responses by atheists and philosophers alike make the claim that the theist has a problem of evil. This claim is based on what they see as a contradiction in God's character, based on how God is defined in Scripture and the evidence of evil and suffering so vividly experienced.

Prominent Atheists such as J.L. Mackie and Anthony Flew have been at the forefront in their attempts to advance the argument against evil to prove that the Judeo-Christian God does not exist. It is their belief that the problem from evil poses a philosophical threat to the design argument because it implies that the

design of the cosmos and the designer of the cosmos are flawed.¹ The atheist's claim is that the problem of evil is not that there is evil in the world. Nor is the problem of evil is that there is so much, or that that there is an unequal balance between good and evil as experienced in the lives of people. Their claim is that there is a problem with evil because there is no logical means by which one can reconcile the idea of a deity who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent in a world where evil exists. They contend that a caring and benevolent God would not allow evil and suffering on those he has created; that an all good and all powerful God would not have created evil in the first place knowing the suffering it would lead to. Further, they state that the theist will need to answer why God, if he is omniscient and able to see what each person will do and become from birth to death, would allow someone like Hitler, or the numerous other masterminds who have committed the gravest acts of evil to ever have been born.

They conclude that if evil comes from God, than for that reason he either does not attain to the Biblical description as given, or he does not exist at all. Therefore, the concept of God in the light of the existence of evil has to be explained or rectified. The atheist contends that what they claim as an apparent inconsistency cannot be resolved in any manner which preserves all the Biblical characteristics of an omnipotent, all loving being. And, that it is necessary that the idea of such a deity would have to change to account for the simultaneous existence of God and evil. Or, it is necessary to change the idea of the nature of evil to account for the simultaneous existence of both the God of the Bible and evidential evil.

¹ Philosophy of Religion Chap. 6: The Problem of Evil, Section 1. Introduction

The theist responds that a god who is not all powerful necessarily means that he is not god. Theists do, however, differ in their interpretation of Scripture as it concerns the attributes of God. They also differ in their beliefs as it concerns the origin of evil. Orthodox Christians do however hold to the view that the Holy Scripture proclaims God to be all-powerful, all-loving, and all-good. I look more fully at and will discuss this topic in the following chapter.

There are many who have a problem with the concept of the all powerful, good, and loving God as defined in the Holy Scripture and the evil in this world. Not all who see this as a problem are atheists or atheistic in their thinking. In fact, many evangelical Christians, in earnest, would admit that they don't understand it, but accept it. This is due largely because many Christians don't study on the deeper level that this question requires. This is not a criticism, it is just a fact that life often gets in the way in our day to day existence, and, when it does we as humans look for and find ways to do things in our lives that are easiest and in a more expedient way. Often this means relegating the all important task of learning what the Bible actually has to say to what they are being told by someone else. (i.e, the preacher, teacher, evangelist).

In the arena of contemporary debate between the atheist and theist, there has been much discussion. Many theists have concluded, and are persuaded that the problem of evil as proclaimed by atheists does not disprove the existence of God. Furthermore, I believe the theist has an obligation to respond

as he is the last best hope to resolve the problem of evil for the questioning believer as well for others who have found evil to be an obstacle to belief in God.

The problem of evil falls within two main categories and it is vitally important to make a distinction between these two categories. They are the intellectual and the emotional problem of evil. The intellectual problem of evil incorporates two versions: first the logical problem of evil and second, the probabilistic problem of evil. According to the logical problem of evil *"it's logically impossible that God and evil co-exist"*. In a nutshell the logical argument goes like this: if God exists, then evil cannot exist. If evil exist, then God cannot exist. Since evil exist, it follows that God does not exist.

The theist contends that there is no reason to think as does the atheist that God and evil are incompatible because there is no explicit contradiction within this premise, and, that if the atheist intends that there is some implicit contradiction between God and evil, then he must be assuming some hidden premises which bring out this implicit contradiction.² William Lane Craig states that no philosopher has been able to identify or at least substantiate any such premise, and that therefore the logical problem of evil fails to prove any inconsistency between God and evil. Most critical philosophers today agree that the logical problem of evil has been solved, but the theist is not out of the woods yet.³

² William Lane Craig, Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the Grounding Objections. *"Faith and Philosophy 28, 2001*

³ Ibid

The problem for the Christian theist lies with the probabilistic version of the problem of evil. According to this version of the problem, the co-existence of God and evil is logically possible, but nevertheless is improbable. The crux of the problem lies in the atheistic thinking that the extent and depth of evil in the world is so great that it's improbable that God could have a morally sufficient reason for permitting it. Therefore, it's improbable that God exists. The theist has responded with several theodicies defenses, one of which is the free will defense by Alvin Plantinga which I will cover in later chapters. One of most oft used responses is that man is finite and limited to time and space and therefore it is not possible for man to be able to say whether God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil. Although this may be true, as with any defense or theodicy, the theist will need to provide critical background information to the critic in order to explain how he has come to his conclusion.

The second category within the problem of evil is the emotional problem of evil, which concerns how people respond to their dislike of a God who would permit them to suffer. At issue here is a possible crisis of faith. Faced with affliction, the sufferer finds it difficult to reconcile what is happening with his beliefs about God's love and power. I discuss more on the issue in Chapter five.

It is said that the intellectual problem is dealt with best by the philosopher while the emotional problem is best dealt with by the counselor. I believe that the counselor will need to have answers for the questions involving the probabilistic version of the problem of evil so that they will be better equipped to respond to those seeking answers. This is especially so if the counselor counsels from a

theistic point of view. Of course espousing the arguments for or against the intellectual problem of evil during a time that someone is suffering would likely not prove timely or beneficial. They would likely be better served by a comforting word or a listening ear. However, what the counselor believes about God and evil will play a role in the counseling process if the sufferer at some point seeks to reconcile his emotions, beliefs, and experience.

Chapter Two: Evil: Its Origin

When asked to define evil, for most it is a difficult question to answer. It is not enough to cite examples of evil as a way of defining it, and in examining the problem of evil one necessarily will need a working definition to employ. For the purposes of this paper I will mean when using the word evil: that which is accepted as morally wrong; and that which causes harm or injury

There are two types of evil. First there is moral evil. This is the product of an action (or inaction), which was initiated by a moral agent toward another person, who in turn, may suffer from such action (or inaction). An example of this would be homicide, which would be termed as active moral evil. By the way of contrast, an example of passive moral evil would be watching a person being struck by a car and bleeding profusely and choosing to not call for help. The second type of evil is that of natural evil. This is where a moral agent is not involved. Examples of this could be earthquakes, hurricanes, or tsunamis.

Many of us think of evil as a separate and competitive force in opposition to good; two coordinating powers battling each other as equal rivals. In actuality, there are three major views of evil, they are pantheism which affirms God and denies the existence of evil; atheism affirms the existence of evil and denies the existence of God; and theism which affirms both God and evil. Suffice it to say, that one's view of evil greatly affects his view of who God is and what his relationship is to man as it affects his life.

The Pantheist believes God exists and important to their view is their belief that there is no separation between God and the universe. This view is contrary to what is held in the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These religions teach that God is transcendent, which means that God is separate from and independent of the time-space universe. Pantheism is more in line with the concept of immanence in which God is intrinsically a part of the universe.¹ Therefore, as a result of their belief that God is good and God is all, they deny the existence of evil. One might rightly ask, if evil is not real, why does it bring such suffering and pain.

Monism is a challenge to the existence of evil. Monists argue that the universe is perfect and good and that the concept of evil is an illusion that evokes the feeling of suffering. Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Science Movement, argued that evil and suffering are in the mind. She claimed that if sufferers would only realize there is not reality to their pain, then their pain would instantly stop. One may rightly ask, if evil is just an illusion how then can we explain where evil comes from as well as its prevalence and persistence. Further, proponents of this belief have not been successful in their explanation as to why if evil is just an illusion and all in our minds, why there is no viable evidence that it can be controlled at our wills.

Monism is not widely accepted as it is counter-intuitive. The view that pain is mental and can be controlled by the will assumes substance dualism, a view that most philosophers reject. Those critical of this view ask why would an all good God allow the illusion of evil when it causes such pain and suffering? The theory

¹ Michael J. Vlach, *Philosophy 101*, (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2007) 116

trivializes pain and suffering and evokes many other questions such as, if evil is just an illusion, on what ground is morality important? In other words, why would one feel any moral obligation to avoid evil actions and pursue good ones? And, why should one ease the “imaginary” sufferings of others?

Atheists believe that because evil is evident and in some cases appear to be gratuitous and qualitative that God does not exist. Sigmund Freud claimed that God is an illusion because such a belief in God is based on wish fulfillment. He proclaimed that although it would be nice if there were a God, it would also be nice if there were a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. In his mockery of those who hold a belief in God, Freud confused a wish and a need. The mere fact that we wish something to exist does not mean that it does. But, it is reasonable to believe that if we truly need something, then it does exist²

Francis Collins, scientist and head of the Genome Projects puts it this way:

Why would such a universal and uniquely human hunger [for God] exist, if it were not connected to some opportunity for fulfillment? Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water.³

Orthodox theists believe that God and evil exist and that while there are no simplistic answers composed into a neat little package to explain from a philosophical stance, there are several sound and logical theodicies and defenses that have served to answer the atheistic claim that God does not exist

² Norman Geisler, *If God, Why Evil*, Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011

³ Francis Collins, *The Language of God*, (New York: Free Press, A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2006), 38

because an all good and powerful God would not allow evil and suffering. While the theist must account for the problem of evil as posed by the atheist, the atheist had a more daunting task in that he must account for the problem of both good and evil.

On what basis can atheists say that anything is good or evil? The foundation of their disbelief in an all good and powerful God is based primarily on their argument that the universe is so cruel and unjust. But where does the question of cruel and unjust, good and evil arise? C. S Lewis said” a man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”⁴ So if there is a moral law which exhorts that one ought to choose the good, then we can assume a Moral Lawgiver. Moral law is based on the premise that there is such a thing as right and wrong, and that there are some things one “ought” to do and some things one “ought not” to do. I think everyone believes in a moral law, even those who argue that they don’t still get upset when an injustice is perceived either upon themselves or someone whom they care about. The question is how to definitively determine what is right and wrong.

Theists contend that this premise is internally present at birth and that it is universal. Atheists say that it is a matter of opinion and is not derived from any inherent law from an omniscient being. They say that it is a matter of culture and societal norms. But it is illogical to think that societies and cultures can determine what is right and wrong because societies and cultures differ. What if two

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 1952. A revised and amplified edition, San Francisco; HarperCollins, 2001

different societies disagree, by simple logic, it is obvious that they both can't be right.

Again, the theist contends that once it can be established that there is a moral law, it follows that there must be a moral law giver. Without this standard, then when two people disagree about a moral judgement, all you have is two conflicting opinions with no way to decide the issue. Yet in reality two conflicting things cannot both be right. It seems the only way to resolve the dilemma is for there to be a real, objective standard, which the Christian calls God. When you take away, or ignore, this standard, what you get is a relativistic or morally subjective society.⁵

Theists most often offer the moral law in support of God's existence. The essence of the argument is that objective moral values exist and are best explained by the existence of a transcendent being whose very essence is good. The atheist responds that one need not believe in God to be moral or good. He says, after all, look at me, I am a moral person and I don't believe in God. Thus, he concludes that God is not necessary for morality.

The atheist has misconstrued the theists argument, either by intent as a guise to out maneuver a less knowledgeable opponent when possible, or by just a mere attempt to avoid facing the real question at hand. The theist is not arguing that one must believe in God to recognize moral truths (a claim about moral epistemology), or to behave morally, but rather that God must exist for there to even be such a thing as morality (a claim about ontology). God's existence is necessary to ground moral values in objective reality. If there is no God, there

⁵ Mark C. Murphy, *God and Moral law*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011

can be no such thing as objective moral values. We might choose to call certain behaviors “good” and certain behavior “evil,” but such ascriptions are subjective determinations by human communities; i.e. they merely describe the beliefs and preferences of human subjects, not some object that exists transcendent to them⁶

The question therefore is not how we know what is moral, but how we make sense of the existence of moral values to begin with. From where do moral values come, and why do they exist? These are the hard questions that will need to be settled is one’s own personal worldview. Serious conclusions can be drawn when the focus is placed on the ontological argument concerning the moral law as opposed to allowing oneself to be drawn in to the non-conclusive cycle of the epistemological argument of this question.

While there are various theodicies and defenses utilized by theists to respond to atheist, as stated earlier, not all theists are on the same page in their belief concerning the problem from evil. If the theist claims that God does exist, how can he at the same time say evil exists? There are several modes of thinking, and although not all of the following options are orthodox they are held by many in Christendom. One of the ways in which some have reconciled their thinking on the dilemma of how an all good, all powerful God could allow evil and suffering is to change the definition of the Biblical view of who God is. This was done most famously by Rabbi Harold Kushner in his best seller *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. In it he posits that God is neither all-good nor is He all-powerful.

⁶ Dulle, Jason, *The typical Atheist’s Response to the Moral Argument for God’s Existence*. 2010

If we bring ourselves to acknowledge that there are some things God does not control, many good things become possible... (45) Are you capable of forgiving God even when you have found out that He is not perfect? (148) However, I agree with Norman Geisler that Rabbi Kushner has several serious issues with this view of God. He quotes C. S Lewis as saying “how can we know something is not perfect unless we know what is perfect?” So if there were a *not*-perfect being that permitted or inflicted evil on this world, then such a being would not be God but the devil. The imperfect implies a perfect standard (God) by which we measure the not perfect. Kushner’s imperfect God implies that there is a perfect God beyond this imperfect world.⁷

Gregory Boyd claims that we can still hold to the idea that God is all-powerful, and all-good, but that we shouldn’t confuse that statement to mean, “God exercises all power.”⁸ The intent here is that we can keep orthodox terminology, but we should just reinterpret what it means. This of course is at its best misleading and does nothing to contribute to the quest for logically sound and scripturally accurate responses in the face of this dilemma. Boyd is correct in saying that God does not exercise all the power He could. But at issue here is that he fails to see that being all powerful does mean the same thing as having all the power and ability to do what one wants to do. Therefore, Boyd is wrong

⁷ Norman Geisler, *If God Why Evil*: Grand Rapids, MI. Bethany House Publishers, A division of Baker Publishing Group, 2011

⁸ Gregory Boyd, *Is God to Blame? Beyond Pat answers to the problem of Suffering*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 57

when he claims God is all powerful, yet simultaneously insinuate that God cannot do what he most wants to do, namely eradicate evil.⁹

Even more difficult for most to define evil, is to address what seems an insurmountable task, the origin of evil and finding consistency among theologians. As stated earlier, there are various belief systems based on the concept that evil does not exist; that evil experienced is illusory. However, those of us having experienced it, either personally or vicariously know that it is real and present. Where evil originates is a topic of immense importance; however, it is a topic that is seldom examined or discussed. This is unfortunate in that failure to investigate important issues relative to a strong and vibrant faith only serves to possibly render faith most vulnerable when tried and tested.

The reality of evil has led many great critical thinkers to come to many different conclusions concerning the origin of evil. For the purpose of this paper we will discuss the conclusions proposed by Augustine, Irenaeus, by way of John Hick, and Alvin Plantinga. For most it is unthinkable to suggest that God is the creator of evil, yet the question has been presented in this manner:

1. God created all things
2. Evil is something
3. Therefore, God created it.¹⁰

How does the theist respond to this argument? After all, the basis of this premise arises out of the most basic teaching of Scripture as it declares that God is the

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Norman Geisler, *If God, Why Evil*, Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011.

creator of heaven and earth. (Genesis 1:1); and in John “all things were made through Him, and without him nothing was made that was made” (1:3)

The theist heartily concurs with premise 1 of this summation, and in varying degrees of differentiation, premise 2 is accepted as well. The crux of the outcome of this summation rests solidly on premise 2 in that the debate is centered squarely on what the definition of “thing” is.

The theist asserts that in response to this argument one requires background information to provide relative insight. As it concerns the creation of all things in Genesis 1, at the completion of work on almost every day God declared that “it is good.” From this the theist responds that God created only good things. The inference to be drawn here is that evil is not a thing because evil is not good, nor does it have substance; if evil is not a thing, it did not need creating. From this a restatement of the argument follows:

1. God created all things.
2. Evil is not a thing.
3. Hence God did not create evil.¹¹

This may or may not be a convincing argument, but the quest remains that if God only created good things, from where then did evil arise? Augustine has made considerable contribution to the understanding of the origin and definition of evil; it is accepted as the most intellectually credible and emotionally satisfying solution on this subject. Augustine recognized that an explanation for the existence of evil must be given, or else one must accept either that God created evil and so is therefore partly evil as well as good.

¹¹ Ibid

Augustine's explanation on the origin of evil is that evil is a privation, or a corruption of good. He states that "evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has received the name evil."¹² Augustine observed that evil always does injury, and that such injury is a deprivation of good. If there were no deprivation, there would be no injury. Since all things were made with goodness, evil must be a deprivation of goodness.¹³ The diminution of the property of goodness is what Augustine calls evil. In his view good has substantial being while evil does not. It is likened to a moral hole, a nothingness that exists when good is removed. Further he uses the example of light and shadow. A shadow is a darkness cast by an object blocking the light. If there were no light, then there could be no shadows, for there would be no source from which the shadow may be cast. Unless there were some light, it cannot be blocked. A shadow is nothing more than the blocking of light. Shadows, then, have their source in the light. He concludes that the shadow is created by the relationship of an object and a light source. The shadow is an effect of this relationship and not a separate, self-existing object.¹⁴

Augustine applies this account of light and shadow to his account of good and evil. He states that "if there were no good in what is evil, then evil simply could not be, since it can have no mode in which to exist, nor any source from which corruption springs, unless it be something corruptible. Unless this

¹² Augustine, *The City of God, Against the Pagans*, (New York: Edited by R.W. Dyson. Cambridge University Press), Chapter 9.

¹³ Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, (Philadelphia: Edited by Albert C. Outler. The Library of Christian Classics), VII: [XII] 18.

¹⁴ Ibid

something is good, it cannot be corrupted, because corruption is nothing more than a deprivation of the good. Evils, therefore, have their source in the good, and unless they are parasitic on something good, they are not anything at all.¹⁵ So then, Augustine argues that evil cannot be chosen because there is no evil thing to choose. A person can only turn away from the good, that is, from a greater good to a lesser good. He describes that the turning away itself from the greater good to the lesser, in his hierarchy of good, is what becomes evil--not because there is evil to which it turns. For Augustine, evil then is the act itself of choosing the lesser good; therefore, the source of evil is in the free will of persons. "And I strained to perceive what I now heard, that free will was the cause of our doing ill."¹⁶ Evil was a "perversion of the will turned aside from...God" to lesser things.¹⁷

Augustine's solution has not been accepted as satisfactory to some. Friedrich Schleiermacher balked at the concept that God gave good creatures the freedom to do bad. He contends that if a being is perfect in its goodness, it would never sin even if it were free to. Evil would then have to create itself ex nihilo, which is ridiculous.¹⁸

It doesn't, however, follow that moral perfection necessarily entails immutability. That's a different type of perfection, a perfection in being. Schleiermacher's objection confuses the two. The fact that a perfectly beautiful ceramic plate is capable of being broken doesn't take away from its aesthetic

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Augustine, Confessions VII: [III] 5.

¹⁷ Ibid. [XVI] 22.

¹⁸ Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 3, 138.

perfections¹⁹. In the same way, it makes sense to say that man was created morally perfect (morally whole or complete, at his proper level of goodness), even though he was immutable in perfection.

The objections raised by atheist philosophers J.L. Mackie and Antony Flew are more substantial. They contend that God could have created man immutable in his goodness, yet still have the opportunity to freely choose in other areas. After all they assert, won't man have immutable goodness in heaven? And will he not also have freedom to choose among certain options? Why not here on earth?

In response, theists say that God could have created such a world as described by Mackie and Flew, but what they fail to see is that God wanted not only free creatures; He also wanted plenitude, that is the greatest good possible. Plenitude—the highest good, the best of all possible worlds—requires moral freedom, and that necessarily entails the possibility of evil.

Many theists hold that since all that God made is good, even those things which appear evil only appear that way because of a limited context or perspective. When viewed as a whole, that which appears to be evil ultimately contributes to the greater good. For example, certain virtues couldn't exist without evil: courage, mercy, forgiveness, and patience, the giving of comfort, heroism, perseverance, faithfulness, self-control, long-suffering, submission and obedience. These are not virtues in the abstract, but elements of character that can only be had by moral souls. Just as evil is a result of acts of the will, so is virtue. Acts of moral choice accomplish both.

¹⁹ Ibid

Those who find the Augustinian theodicy questionable say that Augustine's aim in this view is to clear the creator of any responsibility for the existence of evil as this theodicy places the blame squarely on the creature. It asserts that evil arises from the election of bad over good by the creature through use of his will and ability to do so. Again, Augustine realized that a defense for the existence of evil must be given, or else one would have to accept either that God created evil and so is partly evil as well as good.

The foundation of Augustine's defense of the origin of evil has its roots in the concept of the fall of man from an original state of righteousness. His view of God in part was derived from the Neo-Platonist view that God is the ultimate of being and pure; that He is immutable, eternal, and wholly good. The Augustine theodicy attests that God is good and that he has created all things good. That He has created "out of nothing" all that exists out of nothing excluding himself. It is here that Augustine has met with much criticism in his assessment that God created something out of nothing or *ex nihilo*.

Critics of theism pounce on the theist when what he sees as the theist attempting to use the argument of *ex nihilo* to explain God's creative process when the theist criticizes the atheologist for using the same premise as the basis for his "in the beginning". The theist knows fully well, as the atheist that out of nothing, nothing comes. Rather, what he means we he says that God created the universe and all that there is there in from nothing, he means that God is the

existent first cause, and that the sheer impact of his command of “let there be” brought creation in to being.

Augustine based his theodicy on this very premise that God, the first cause created the universe. He believed that God created the world wholly good, and that God’s creation is based on a hierarchy of beings. By this he means that some creatures were created differently, some were created higher than others on the scale of being. John Hick in *Evil and the God of Love* presents the main gradations of beings as follows;

For, among those beings which exist, and which are not of God the creator’s essence, those which have life are ranked above those which have none; those that have the power of generation, or even of desiring, above those which want this faculty. And, among things that have life, the sentient are higher than those which have no sensation, as animals are ranked above trees. And, among the sentient, the intelligent are above those that have no intelligence – men, e.g. above cattle. And among the intelligent, the immortal, such as the angels, above the mortal, such as men.²⁰

In Augustine’s doctrine of a hierarchy of being each varied form of existence occupies its appropriate place, and the more qualitative and fuller a creature’s nature, the higher it stands on the scale.²¹

The Augustinian doctrine of the creation of man has its foundation in the Genesis account of the Bible. His view of man before the fall was that God created him “good.” That God created woman out of man so that the whole human race would spring out of the one man, Adam.²² Man having a human soul was made in God’s image and likeness. Man having a soul gave him a mind, with

²⁰ John Hick, *Evil and The God of Love*, New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 1966

²¹ IBID

²² Augustine, *The City of God, Against the Pagans*, (New York: Edited by R.W. Dyson. Cambridge University Press), Chapter 9.

intelligence and reason, which placed him in a position that surpassed all other creatures on earth. God placed man in the Garden of Eden and granted him the gift of his grace making it possible to know God intimately because his mind was not colored with sin.

Augustine believed that man's will was both free and good and that he served God willingly with satisfaction and delight. For Augustine writes in *The City of God*, "the choice of the will, then, is genuinely free only when it is not subservient to faults and sins. God gave it true freedom, and now that it has been lost, through its own fault, it can be restored only by him who had the power to give it at the beginning." (569)

Augustine taught that man had the *posse non peccare*, meaning the ability not to sin in his pre-fallen state. He spoke of a "first grace" given man called *adjutorium*, which assisted Adam to continue in his original non-fallen state, but it did not force him to not sin.²³ Augustine's position is that it is only in heaven will man be *non posse peccare*, meaning not possible to sin. So regarding Augustine's view, Adam had not only the possibility to not sin, but he could not sin easily. He offered that man had a bent on doing good; he had a positive tendency to obey God and do good, and yet at the same time he possessed the possibility of sinning, this was the imperfection of that state. Adam had to overcome his tendency or bent on doing good to disobey God.²⁴

²³ R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997

²⁴ *Ibid*

According to Augustine's view of the fall of man, Adam overcame his tendency on doing good and disobeyed God. Man was created to be obedient and if he was loyal, man would have received immortality and bliss without the possibility of death; but if man was disobedient, God's just condemnation was the punishment of death.²⁵ Death of the soul is different from that of the body. Death of the body occurs when the soul departs; death of the soul occurs when God abandons it. The body is mortal and will not live forever, but the soul is immortal because it never stops living and feeling.²⁶

Man was created upright, but God is not responsible for man's defect. Augustine held the view that the whole of the human race was involved in the original sin. He writes in his "Confessions," that he was struck with illness which all but carried him off to hell loaded with all the evil he committed against God, himself, and others and a host of other offenses over and above the bond of original sin, "by which we all have died with Adam" (101-102) Augustine described humanity as a "mass of perdition." After the fall man had lost his ability to not sin and was *non posse non peccare*, meaning not able to not sin.

For Augustine, Adam's sin affected all of his descendents. To fully understand Augustine's doctrine on the fall of man, one must be made aware that he starts with the idea of the organic unity of the human race. In Adam human nature fell, and therefore, all who have inherited that nature from him, who were in him as the fruit in the germ, and who have grown up, as it were, one

²⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. Editor, Hutchins.

²⁶ Ibid

person with him.²⁷ Within Orthodox Church history this has been and is a commonly held interpretation of Scripture. The relation of Adam to posterity is set forth as being a federal representative according to:

Romans 5:12 “By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men for that all [have] sinned.”

Romans 5:14 “Death reigned from Adam to Moses even over those that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.”

Romans 5:17 “By the offence of one death reigned by one.”

1 Corinthians 15:22 “For as in Adam all die.”

There has been much debate over whether there was a mediate or an immediate imputation of Adam’s sin to the human race. A mediate imputation means that sin is passed on through the medium of natural generation or heredity. An immediate imputation means that there is a direct imputation of sin without any medium whatsoever. Did the penalty of human sin fall on the human race directly or indirectly through the medium of an inherited corrupt nature? The evidence indicates that there is an element of immediate imputation of Adam’s sin to the human race for death is the direct and immediate consequence of sin in every generation. The conclusion seems obvious. The human race was prospectively dead the moment that Adam sinned. But there is an element of mediateness in the fact that the corruption of nature and the penalty of the individual took actual effect through a natural or transmission of nature.²⁸

²⁷ *The Augustinian System: The Fall and its Consequences*: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, 153

²⁸ Stanford Murrell, *A foundation for Faith an Introductory Study of Systematic Theology*.

This view was strongly disputed by Pelagius, a contemporary of Augustine. Pelagius was born in Britain, and later lived in Rome where he became a monk and converted many to his view of sin and its effect on man. Pelagius agreed and taught as Augustine that God created Adam good, for everything God created was good. He rooted his view of the nature of man and his free will in his doctrine of creation. Man was created sinless and has moral neutrality. He was neither predisposed nor inclined toward good or evil. He held that the will of man is unchangeable, meaning that it will not undergo change even after it sins. Pelagius believed that there is no inherent corruption in man.²⁹ A person's behavior may change and be sinful, but his inherent nature has not changed.

Pelagius was directed by the principle that God would never command what was impossible for man to do. If God commands that we obey Him, then we must have the ability to obey. His perspective of man started with his natural ability of free will. Free will, in the fullest sense of the word, means that man can choose to do good or evil. The choice of man is not rooted in the moral character of man, but rather in his free and independent will.³⁰ This means that there is no moral development in man, and good and evil are located in the actions of man and do not originate from man's nature. For Pelagius, sin is only in the separate acts of the will. He taught that man did not have a sinful nature, meaning that man is not predisposed or inclined toward sin as Augustine taught. Sin or disobedience as he viewed it is always the deliberate choice of the will, which is perfectly free. Accordingly, Pelagius' doctrine stands on the view that Adam was not created in

²⁹ R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997

³⁰ Jeremy T. Alder, *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, RPM Volume 15, Number 32, 2009

a state of righteousness, but of moral equilibrium. Adam had moral neutrality and was created neither good nor bad.³¹ Adam chose to sin and thus he became sinful. To Pelagius, the idea of passing on sin in procreation is “absurd” (Berkhof, page 234). Pelagius holds a striking difference in view from that of Augustine on the fall of man and the effects of the fall as it relates to sin and evil. Augustine’s view is that in Adam human nature fell by the act of his sin. But his view did not stop with the idea of an organic connection of the human race, and of the sin of Adam with original sin; he also supposed a sort of pre-existence of all the posterity of Adam in himself, so that they actually and personally sinned in him, though not with individual consciousness³². However not many serious theologians hold that view today. But for Pelagius, Adam was not a representative of mankind. He believed that the only effect Adam had on man is that he was a bad example for the rest of humanity; and that even if Adam had not fallen and instead lived obediently to God that he still would have died. Within Pelagius doctrine of the fall of man he does not provide an answer for death and does not indicate if he thought of it as an evil. While Augustine accounts for death as one of the punishments outlined in Scripture as the result of Adams disobedience.

The fall of Adam and the effects of his fall as it relates to mankind and the state of his nature, especially so if one adheres to the Augustinian doctrine that man is not able to not sin in his post fallen state, then one may be able to satisfy his thinking on the existence of moral evil in the actual world. But, with clarity,

³¹ Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing; 1st/Later edition (1953)

³² The Augustinian System: *The Fall and its Consequences*: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, 153

the question remains that if God is all good and that all of He created was good, how then did man fall? John Hick was one of the most ardent critics of the Augustinian doctrine and had much to say concerning Augustine's stance on the fall of man. He outlines the central theme of Augustine's thought on the fall of man in *Evil and the God of Love*:

The whole creation is good; the sun, moon, and stars are good; angelic and human beings are good; birds, reptiles, fish, and animals, trees, flowers, and plants, are all good; light and darkness, heat and cold, sea and land and air: all are good, expressing as they do the creative fecundity of perfect goodness and beauty. (45)

Hick follows with the question, where, then, in a creation that is all good, consisting in a multitudinous host of greater and lesser, higher and lower goods, is the place for evil; and whence does it arise?

This is an area in which many, theist and atheist alike, have criticized Augustine's stance on this doctrine. Hick, in opposition to Augustine's view on the Genesis account of the creation of man, posits a view based more closely associated with the Irenaean theodicy and account of man and the state in which God created him. The Irenaean theodicy predates Augustine by roughly two centuries. Hick follows Irenaeus' thought in regard to the problem of evil, and did not agree with a literal translation of the Genesis account of creation as did Augustine.

Hick rejects the literal translation of the Genesis account of creation because his view is that few contemporary Christians still believe that man was created fully formed and that the Biblical accounts are not factual but rather

illustrative. Specifically, Hick is critical of Augustinian theology because it does not allow for evolution or development of the species, since it assumes that God created man fully formed, and that God created man in his image. Hick was greatly influenced by the Irenaean thought on the fall, and it coincides perfectly with his soul making theodicy which I will more fully elaborate on in chapter Five, Theodicy and Defense.

Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 202) Bishop of Lyons, wrote, in response to Gnosticism the Church's first systematic theology. Within his view of man's inherent state at creation, he established a clear difference between the Greek and Latin Fathers. He makes distinction between the image of God and the likeness of God in man. The "imago", of God which resides in man's bodily form, apparently represents his nature as an intelligent creature capable of fellowship with his Maker, whilst the "likeness" represents man's final perfecting by the Holy Spirit. For the man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God.³³ Based on the Irenaean view, man is finite and is only potentially the perfected being God would have him to be. He is only poised for a process of maturity which will produce growth and development culminating in the finite creature intended by God.

The stark difference between the Augustinian and Irenaean view which is the basis on which Hick employs as the foundation of his own theodicy, and which he uses to criticize the Augustinian view is primarily man's state at creation, how the fall of man is represented, and man's post fall state. Clearly

³³ John Hick, *Evil and The God of Love*, New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 1966

one's view on these issues will determine his view on sin and evil as well as any resulting effect (s) it might have on Adam's descendents.

Hick criticizes the Augustinian view of evil as a privation. His claim is that this view promotes a "self creation of evil." As stated above, Augustine's view is that evil itself has no positive nature, and that the loss of good has received the name evil. Hick contends that this is incomprehensible and nonsensical; that Augustine's view would mean that evil is created from nothing as it has no substance of its own. He further states that aside from this ontological problem that the Augustinian theodicy has, that even if it were true, then this view would still be plagued by the problem of answering why the good was perverted in the first place that evil could exist thereby.

Augustine answers this by saying that while God created man good, he did not create him immutable. He asserts that man by the use of his free will to obey or not obey, even though he was created good, chose to disobey and as a consequence fell from the qualitative good state from which he was created, thus corrupting his nature. In summary, and simply put, as it accords the Augustinian theodicy, Adam was created good; inherent in his nature was the ability to sin. Due to this ability to sin, he possessed the capacity to entertain desires; desires that were inline with his Maker and those that were not. Augustine's view holds that the actual eating of the fruit recorded in the Genesis account is not the "original sin" as thought by many which led to the fall of man. But that the "original sin" began when Adam's desires first began to deviate from that of his

Maker's. The actual eating of the fruit was the culmination of the sinful act of disobedience.

This Augustinian theodicy tradition, or certainly most of it, is widely held amongst those of Catholic and Protestant thought. However, there are many who hold divergent views which have been put forward as viable alternatives because those promoting them have emphasized, and in some cases, expressed what they feel is the woefully lacking cohesiveness and the incompatibility of thought within the Augustinian view. They are also critical of this view because they feel that it creates more issues rather than solve the primary issue of how evil first came about and leaves many questions unanswered. At this point we will take a more detailed look at workings of theodicies and defenses.

Chapter Three: Theodicy and Defense

A Theodicy is a response to the problem from evil whose goal it is to provide actual reasons for God allowing evil and suffering in the world. Historically, theists have responded to the atheist's problem from evil by utilizing both theodicies and defenses. Before proceeding I would like to establish that there is a vast difference between a theodicy and a defense. Gottfried Leibniz pioneered the concept of theodicy which literally means "justification of God." He coined this term in his work *Essay in Theology* as he defended God in light of the problem of evil. According to Leibniz, the world we have, with evil in it, is the best of all possible worlds. Since God is perfect and good, He had to create the best world from a realm of other possible worlds.³⁴ Leibniz however, did not believe that God is the author of evil; rather, he believed that evil results from the misuse of human freedom. This type of response can be found in the writings of the early church fathers as far back as Irenaeus and St. Augustine of Hippo. These are the writings that so greatly influenced Leibniz, and contemporary philosophers such as John Hick, Alvin Plantinga, and Stephen J. Wykstra.

The goal of the theodacist is to justify God's ways to man for allowing evil in the world by answering the following problem, which in its most basic form involves these assumptions:

1. God is all good and all powerful (and therefore all knowing).
2. The universe/creation was made by God and/or exists in a contingent

³⁴ Michael J. Vlach, *Philosophy 101*, Theological Studies Press (Sun Valley, CA., 2007)

relationship to God.

3. Evil exists in the world. Why?

As David Blumenthal observes, a good theodicy is one that has three characteristics:

1. "It should leave one with one's sense of reality intact" (It tells the truth about reality.)
2. "It should leave one empowered within the intellectual-moral system in which one lives." (Namely, it should not deny God's basic power or goodness.)
3. "It should be as intellectually coherent as possible." (It is an answer that is both coherent and life-satisfying.)³⁵

I agree with Blumenthal's assessment of what a successful theodicy should entail, but one has to be mindful that not every culture deals with evil in the same way. As Amelie Rorty notes, evil and its relationship to the world has been understood in the west alone in a number of ways, including The Neo-platonic, Manichaeism, Pious fideism, and Non-existent to name a few. A theodicy that provides a positive framework must at least be consistent with what is known about this world and that religious framework.

While the theodicy's goal is to tell us why God permits evil and is told as the real truth of the matter, this is quite different from a defense in that the aim here is not to say what God's reason (s) is, but at most to say what God's reason *might possibly be*. A defense seeks to show that theistic belief in God in the face of evil is rational. A logical defense is not making claims about how God actually works as much as showing that the atheistic charges can be met. Therefore,

³⁵ David Blumenthal, *Renewing the Promise*. Oxford University, 1988

theists offering a defense are not burdened with the need to prove their premise as to why an omnipotent, all-good God would allow evil. He only needs to offer a logically possible explanation. However, a sound defense will necessarily be bound by certain boundaries, one of which is that it will need to show consistency within the religious system.

This distinction between theodicy and defense was instituted by Alvin Plantinga. He has utilized it to respond to the logical problem of evil in what has become the most widely recognized and used defense today, known as the free will defense. Although there is similarity in the general structure of a theodicy and a defense, the purpose utilized by the former is to give actual reasons for evil, whereas the purpose of the latter is to tell a possible true story that would demonstrate that the atheist's premise of the problem from evil does not provide proof that God does not exist.

The key difference between theodicy and defense is not content, but intent. With a theodicy the intent is to give actual reasons. The reasons themselves might be the same, but the goal to be accomplished by one giving those reasons is different. Peter Van Inwagen has precisely characterized this difference between theodicy and defense. He writes;

A defense is not necessarily different from a theodicy in content. Indeed, a defense and a theodicy may well be verbally identical. Each is, formally speaking a story according to which evil and God exists. The difference between a defense and a theodicy lies not in their content but in their purpose. A theodicy is a story that is told as the real truth of the matter; a defense is a story that, according to the teller, may or may not be true, but which, the teller maintains, has some desirable feature that does not entail truth – perhaps (depending on the context) logical consistency or epistemic possibility (truth-for-all-anyone-knows)³⁶

³⁶ Peter Van Inwagen, *The problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7.

This understanding of the difference of a theodicy and defense guides one's attitude when making a response to the problem of evil. Because different responses to the problem will take different forms, there could be a host of different defenses to the different problems.

One such example would be when presented with a problem of evil the theist might respond by demonstrating that the premises in the argument do not provide rational reasons to accept the conclusion. Such a defense would be successful whether the problem of evil presented against Christian theism was logical or evidential in nature. If the distinguishing mark between theodicy and defense is intent, then one could respond to both problems of evil by telling a just-so story that either demonstrates that the logical compatibility of God and evil or demonstrates that the existence of evil does not make God's non-existence more likely than his existence. However, this understanding of a defense is not universal. Michael Murray, after relegating defenses to only logical problems of evil, writes "Defenses will be of little use in our context because... they do not aim to provide explanations that undercut the evidential value of evil."³⁷ Of course, if the problem of evil addressed is not logical in nature, then the response demonstrating the logical compatibility of some set of propositions will not be satisfactory, but one may give a defense to the problem of evil that is not logical in nature at all.

³⁷ Michael Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37

What seems to lead to this misrepresentation is that defenses are typically thought of as a type of response. It is thought that a defense is simply the attempt to show that some set of propositions is logically consistent and if the set is logically consistent, then the argument claiming they are not fails. While a particular defense may include something like this, one should not restrict all defenses to this line of argumentation. For example, the proponent of the evidential argument claims that some set of propositions shows that God's non existence is more likely than His existence, given evil. If a defense is simply a type of a response dealing with logical consistency, then it clearly will not work here because the claim is not that the set is logically inconsistent, but that even though it is possible that God exists, it is less likely that He does because of the existence of evil.³⁸ There are at least two ways one could respond to the evidential argument from evil. The first way to respond we can call a rebuttal. Giving a rebuttal would be to demonstrate that there is some flaw in the original argument. That is, it would not seek to offer any positive argument for the co-existence of God and evil at all, but instead seek to show that, for example, there is an equivocation with one of the key terms or that an improper inference has been made between two premises.³⁹ Either response would be sufficient to show that the argument from evil at hand does not succeed.

³⁸ Such a complaint can be found in Joel Thomas Tierno, "On Defense as Opposed to Theodicy," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 59 (2006): 167-174

³⁹ For an insightful exchange based upon whether an improper inference is being made in certain evidential arguments see Stephen Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," and William Rowe, *The evidential Argument from evil: A Second Look* both in Howard-Snyder 1996.

A second way one could respond is by supplying some proposition that would explain the necessity of evil. For example, an advocate of the evidential problem of evil might agree that there are some evils necessary to bring about a good and that, as long as that good sufficiently outweighs the necessary evils, God is morally justified in allowing that evil to occur. However, this person may go on to argue that some evils appear to serve no good whatsoever.⁴⁰ Because those evils are not needed in any way an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God would prevent them from occurring. But since they do occur, one is justified in believing there is no such God.

However, if one were to demonstrate that those evils are indeed necessary for some good, then that particular argument from evil would fail. Such a demonstration would provide reasons to believe that God had to allow those evils in order to achieve some good or prevent some worse evil. When presenting such a response one has two options concerning the intent of the argument. One might argue that the propositions that demonstrate the necessity of those evils are actually true. That is, one could seek to give God's actual reasons for those evils and those that make such an effort would be employing theodicy. However, one might also argue that those propositions are simply possibly true. But, because the original argument did not concern strict logical possibility, one would have to do more than just demonstrate the possibility of those propositions being true. One would also have to demonstrate that the probability of the propositions being true is greater than that of their being false. Those that

⁴⁰ William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1979): 335-341

engage in this second project would be offering a defense. A defense, then, would be any attempt to provide some proposition, or set of propositions, that demonstrate the argument from evil fails, and this understanding of defense applies equally to the logical problem of evil and the evidential problem of evil.

This more precise understanding of a defense should be something that even Murray would accept given that he also suggests the main difference between a theodicy and defense is that a theodicy aims “to provide the known truth about why God permits evil.”⁴¹ The alternative to providing “the known truth” would be to provide a response that is possibly true. But providing a response that is possibly true can equally apply to the logical and evidential problems. Such a response might be offered to demonstrate how a set of propositions are logically consistent, but a different possibly true proposition might be offered as a reason to think it is more likely that God exists given evil than that He does not exist.

To summarize, one can distinguish responses to the theoretical problem of evil in one of three ways: a rebuttal, a theodicy, and a defense. A rebuttal to the problem is a response that gives reasons to believe that the problem of evil under consideration fails due to an internal problem with the specific argument. In providing such a response, the individual does not make use of any additional premises, but instead simply demonstrates that there is some internal flaw in that problem of evil, an improper inference being one example that prevents the problem from succeeding.

⁴¹ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 37

The second way one might respond to the theoretical problem is to offer a theodicy. When giving a theodicy additional premises are presented and there is an expectation that the proponent of the problem of evil accepts those premises as accurately representing the way the world really is. Because the details of a theodicy are supposed to be reflective of the actual world, there is at least an implicit expectation that those details should be accepted as true by all participants in the debate. Finally, one might present a defense to the theoretical problem. A defense might look identical to a theodicy, but there is no expectation that all must accept the details of the defense as being actually representative of the way the world is.

One of the most accepted responses to the problem of evil is based upon human free will. Two of the most utilized responses based on free will have come from St. Augustine of Hippo and Alvin Plantinga. Each appeal to some good that is gained by God creating humans with free will, but many understand Augustine to believe himself as presenting the actual truth to the matter, whereas Plantinga specifically states that he is only presenting what might possibly be the case. In other words, Augustine presented what is known as free will theodicy while Plantinga presented a free will defense.⁴²

For Augustine the problem of evil was not primarily a problem in justifying belief in the Christian God given the existence of evil. Instead it was a problem explaining *how* an omnibenevolent God and evil could coexist, not *if* they

⁴² While Plantinga's work on the problem of evil is most famously associated with his defense, he has recently also given a theodicy in, Alvin Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'," *in Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Peter Van Inwagen (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 1-25

coexist.⁴³ This is why, in *On Free Choice of the Will*, he begins his theodicy by giving a proof that God exists and is necessarily good.⁴⁴ The question is not “given the existence of evil, does an omnibenevolent God exist?” But instead, given the existence of an omnibenevolent God, how does evil exist? In response to this latter question Augustine first argues that evil is not an actual substance, but is instead a privation of good. Augustine is not advocating here that evil was not real. He knew that evil was real. Independent evidence (natural theology) was enough to convince him that God existed and that everything he created would be good. Evil, then, must be something real, but not a “thing” in the conventional sense. Evil is not a created thing, but spoiled goodness made possible by the free moral agency of rational creatures. Evil is not something present, but something missing, a privation.

Speaking of evil as a privation of good fully covers the range of created things, but in addition to those things, there are also evil actions committed by humans. Humans, as rational creatures, have free wills that permit them to choose rightly or wrongly. William Mann concisely characterizes this aspect of Augustine’s thought. He writes, “A genuinely free will necessarily carries with it the liability to sin. But without having freedom of choice, with its built in liability, humans would lack the capacity to choose to live rightly.”⁴⁵ Because God desired

⁴³ Michael Murray has argued that this is how the problem of evil was addressed by almost all theologians and philosophers through at least Leibniz. Michael Murray, “Leibniz on the problem of evil,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2005 Edition)*, ed. Edward E. N. Zalta, URL=<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2005/entries/Leibniz-evil/>

⁴⁴ Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for Good*, 14.

⁴⁵ William E. Mann, “Augustine on Evil and Original Sin,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46.

a world in which humans could rightly, and deserve reward for those choices, God had to create a world in which humans had a genuine opportunity to choose wrongly. According to Augustine, if man did not have free choice of will, how could there exist the good according to which it is just to condemn evildoers and reward those who act rightly? Both punishment and reward would be unjust if man did not have free will.⁴⁶

It does not appear that Augustine thought this explanation was simply possibly true, instead it seems he believed it was actually true. A person that does not believe in God because of the existence of evil should be able to come to belief in God once that person understands how and why God allows evil to exist. The chief advantage of such a theodicy is that it can advance the dialectic between theists and non-theists. Many, of course will not be convinced by such a theodicy, but those taking part in the debate understand that the success of the theodicy would force the theist to readdress the problem in a more satisfactory way, or at least have serious cause for concern. However, this advantage comes at a cost. The theist now must maintain that details of the theodicy correspond to God's reasons for allowing evil and to the actual features of this world.

Mackie and Theodicy

J.L. Mackie credits the free will theodicy as being the most important response to the problem of evil, but that it fails in its attempt to meet the standard

⁴⁶ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Anna Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), book II, chapter 1, 36.

of a logically acceptable defense. In *Evil and Omnipotence*, Mackie makes the argument that the existence of God is logically incompatible with the existence of evil in the world. He goes further to argue that an Augustinian type response will not adequately solve the problem. In order to see the difficulty Mackie's argument creates for a free will theodicy like Augustine's, a brief presentation of Mackie's argument is in order. We will then be able to more fully see in what ways Plantinga's defense to the logical problem of evil differs from Augustinian theodicy.

Mackie's presentation of the logical problem of evil purports to demonstrate a contradiction within the following propositions:

(1) God is omnipotent and wholly good

and

(2) Evil exists

At this point in Mackie's argument there is no significant protest from the orthodox theologian, he agrees that God is omnipotent and wholly good and that evil does exist, and Mackie himself notes that there is no explicit contradiction in believing that both an omnipotent and wholly good being could co-exist with evil. However, Mackie establishes an explicit contradiction by adding to the above proposition what he terms "quasi logical rules connecting the terms 'good', 'evil', and 'omnipotent'."⁴⁷

These additional rules are:

⁴⁷ J.L. Mackie, *Evil and Omnipotence*, *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955): 201

(3) Good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.

and

(4) There are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.

Both (3) and (4) are debated within Christian thought, and while there is no clear consensus on whether a good thing will always want to eliminate evil, or that there is no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, there is clear consensus established against Mackie's proposition when he adds them to (1) and (2).

According to Mackie, a logical incompatibility exists between all four propositions. In order to off set these propositions one might reject that God is omnipotent or that He is wholly good, but that would be a serious departure from the traditional teachings of Scripture. One might reject that there is actual evil in the world such as that the pantheistic view purports, but given the evidence we see and experience of pain and suffering, this claim seems to suggest absurdity at best and lunacy at worst.

Mackie somewhat agrees with the proponents of a free will defense, that it is "perhaps the most important proposed solution to the problem" but that it is unsatisfactory "primarily because of the incoherence of the notion of freedom of the will," and because if God is able to create individuals that freely choose the good on one occasion, then he should be able to create individuals that freely choose the good on every occasion.⁴⁸ When choosing which world to create, God was not simply faced with the choice of choosing a world with free creatures that freely commit moral evil or a world with no free creatures and no moral evil.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 209

Instead there was the “obviously better possibility of making beings that would act freely but always go right.” His failure to create such a world is “inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.”⁴⁹ Mackie makes a valid point and raises a reasonable objection. Orthodox Christian theism argues that what Mackie describes is determinism, and that it is completely incompatible with the ability to freely choose. However, Mackie’s objections must be met with a substantial response from the theist in order to claim the position of having made a logical and coherent defense against this problem from evil.

If compatibilist freedom is all that is necessary for morally significant actions, then why would God refrain from creating such a world? The type of freedom referenced in a free will theodicy demands that morally significant actions require a more robust sense of freedom of an incompatibilist sort. Do morally significant actions require an incompatibilist freedom, or is Mackie correct in suggesting that one can act in a morally significant way even though he was determined to do so? While answering this fundamental question would be quite helpful in dealing with the logical problem of evil and the age old debate about how one should understand the nature of freedom concerning human action, there is at least one way of answering Mackie’s objection without too much digression into this seemingly intractable debate.

Plantinga’s Defense

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Alvin Plantinga has offered a response to the problem of evil that is very similar in structure to Augustine's free will theodicy, but is what he has termed as a "free will defense." Augustine's theodicy was intended to provide a response to the problem of evil in general; Plantinga's defense is presented as a response to Mackie's logical problem of evil in particular. Plantinga has actually presented two solutions to the problem and neither requires rejecting (1) or (2). The first solution would be to argue that one of the "quasi logical rule" stated in (3) and (4) is false, or to show they are, at least, far from being necessarily true. Because largely incompatible are incompatible in all possible worlds, if it turns out that either (3) or (4) are not necessarily true, then there is some possible world where at least one of them is false. In that possible world, Mackie's logical problem of evil would fail because (3) and (4) are needed to generate the explicit contradiction. But if a set is logically consistent in any possible world, then it is logically consistent in every possible world – this one included. This negative approach only aims to demonstrate flaws in Mackie's argument and nothing more.

The second solution to the problem that Plantinga presents goes further by giving a positive argument demonstrating that (1) and (2) are consistent. The basic idea behind this argument is that there may be some third proposition that is consistent with (1), and entails (2). Plantinga writes,

One way to show that P&Q are consistent is to find some other proposition R such that P and R are consistent, and such that P and R entails Q...Now it is impossible to see that R need not be true, or probable, or plausible, or accepted by the scientists of our culture circle, or congenial to "man come of age," or

anything of the sort: it need only to be such that its conjunction with P is possible and entails Q. R can do its job perfectly well even if it is extraordinarily improbable or known to be false.⁵⁰

While Plantinga's strategy here is different from that of the first solution, the underlying idea remains the same. He is attempting to demonstrate that Mackie's argument fails by dealing with what might possibly be the case. If it can be shown that there is some proposition that is possibly true, and consistent with (1), that entails (2), then Mackie's argument fails. This is the case no matter how far from this world one must go to find such a proposition.

In *The nature of Necessity* Plantinga seeks to demonstrate that Mackie's assumption that an omnipotent God could create free creatures that always choose rightly is false. More specifically, he argues that it is at least logically possible that in order for the world to contain moral good there must be creatures that are significantly free in that world and that any world containing significantly free creatures will also contain moral evil as a result of those creatures choosing wrongly. Plantinga argues that the conjunction of the following propositions are consistent with (1) and together entail (2). Those propositions are:

(5) God has created significantly free creatures

and

(6) each of those creatures suffers from transworld depravity.

A person is free with respect to some action if "no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine that he will perform the action, or that he will not."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Plantinga, "self-Profile," 42-43

⁵¹ Plantinga, Alvin, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 165-166

This is, in the words of Derek Pereboom, “a paradigmatic type of libertarian freedom.”⁵² Plantinga goes on to distinguish free actions from *significantly* free actions. Whereas a free action is any act that is exercised in this libertarian sense, a significantly free action is one that is free and would be either morally right to perform and morally wrong to abstain from performing, or vice versa. Plantinga goes on to argue that in order for God to actualize a world with moral good, he must actualize a world that contains significantly free creatures. This alone is not sufficient to demonstrate that Mackie’s assumption is false because there may be a possible world where every creature is significantly free, and yet always freely choose the good.

However, Plantinga also argues that not every possible world is an actualizable world and it is the essential point of the free will defense that it is not possible for God to actualize such a world. In showing why there are some possible worlds that God cannot actualize, Plantinga distinguishes between strong and weak actualization. For God to strongly actualize something is for Him to directly bring about that state of affairs. If the definition of a significantly free decision includes the idea that no antecedent conditions determines one’s decision to perform an action, then it should be clear that God cannot strongly actualize any significantly free decision. However, if God knows what decision a significantly free agent would make if placed in certain circumstances, and causes that agent to be in those circumstances, then we can say that God weakly actualizes that decision. When considering if an omnipotent being could

⁵² Pereboom, Derek, *The Problem of Evil*, in the Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion, ed. William E. Mann (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 150

create a world in which its participants always freely choose the good, we are trying to determine if God could weakly actualize such a world. Is it possible for God to weakly actualize a world containing significantly free creatures that never choose wrongly?

According to Plantinga, if (6) is possible then God could not weakly actualize such a world. Any creature that suffers from transworld depravity, and is created significantly free, will at some point choose wrongly, no matter the circumstances in which he is placed. This means that it is possible that not even God could weakly actualize a world with significantly free creatures that always choose rightly. Given the nature of the defense, one need not worry about the actual truth, or even the plausibility, of (5) or (6). To adequately solve the logical problem of evil, (5) and (6) need only be possible. If as Plantinga maintains, both (5) and (6) are logically possible, then there is an R that is compatible with (1) and (2).

Some proponents of the logical problem of evil have attempted to show that Plantinga's defense does not work because (6) may not be logically possible. Others argue that a lack of reasons showing why (6) is not possible is not sufficient to establish that it is possible.⁵³ Whether these arguments succeed or not, they seem to appropriately understand the strategy of Plantinga's defense. The same cannot be said for others that have argued that Plantinga's free will defense does not work because (5) is false. For example, in *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, Brian Davies writes, "So we can forget about the Free

⁵³ This line of argument is developed in Keith DeRose, "Plantinga, Presumption, Possibility, and the Problem of Evil," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21, no.4 (1991)

Will Defense as an exoneration of God with respect to moral evil. The notion of human freedom which is central to this defense (freedom independent of God's causal activity) is a mirage given that God is the maker of all things, the source of their being for as long as they exist."⁵⁴ Davies is correct that the truth of (5) is important for the theist, but he has mistaken the role it is playing in Plantinga's defense. Its truth would matter only if using it as a premise in something akin to and Augustinian free will theodicy. Plantinga only needs (5) to be possible; he does not need it to be true.

Making note of this aspect of Plantinga's strategy highlights the difference between a theodicy and a defense. While a theodicy attempts to give a positive explanation for the existence of evil, a defense only seeks to rebuff arguments attempting to establish the non-existence of God based on the existence of evil. To this end, it seems that the free will defense is a success. Prominent atheologian William Rowe writes, "Some philosophers have contended that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God. No one, I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant claim. Indeed, granted incompatibilism [between free will and determinism], there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of the theistic God."⁵⁵ While one may believe that incompatibilism is false, and even argue persuasively that it is, that is different from establishing that incompatibilism is impossible. It is the sheer possibility that incompatibilism about free will and determinism is true that allows Plantinga to

⁵⁴ Davies, Brian, *The reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 129

⁵⁵ Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some varieties of Atheism," 335, n1.

argue that God has created significantly free beings, which is central to the possibility of those beings suffering from transworld depravity. It is that same possibility that also allows Plantinga to argue that (1) and (2) are logically consistent regarding natural evil because it is possible that, “the natural evil we find is due to free actions of non-human spirits.”⁵⁶ No matter how unlikely or improbable we find this to be, it does not matter if the possible existence of non-human spirits adequately function as an R that, conjoined with P, entails Q.

An Objection to Plantinga’s Use of a Defense

Even though some find Plantinga’s defense unsuccessful,⁵⁷ his general strategy for responding to the logical problem of evil is mostly uncontroversial. However, there has been some resistance as to whether or not Plantinga’s employment of that strategy is successful. Plantinga has consistently maintained that the propositions employed in a free will defense need only be possible, and this prevents him from having to answer the question as to whether or not human agents actually have libertarian freedom. However, Jerry Walls has argued that Plantinga’s defense is committed to the actual truth of libertarian freedom and, because of that, Plantinga must “move out of the relatively modest realm of defense into the bolder arena of theodicy.”⁵⁸ If Walls is correct, then even though

⁵⁶ Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 192

⁵⁷ See, for example, Fred Chernoff, *The Obstinancy of Evil*, *Mind* 89, no. 354

⁵⁸ Walls, Jerry, *Why Plantinga Must Move from Defense to Theodicy*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 no. 2 (1991): 378

one would simply offer some possibly true proposition that would demonstrate the compatibility of evil and the existence of an omnipotent, wholly good God, it is not an option for those that employ libertarian freedom in the venture.

Walls believes that Plantinga must make this move because “If God is necessarily perfectly good, as well as essentially omnipotent and omniscient, then it is not even possible that we are free only in the compatibilist sense, then there should be no evil because God could have created each human agent free in this sense while ensuring none choose evil. Walls argument is as follows:

(7) If God is necessarily perfectly good, He eliminates all evil He can properly eliminate in all possible worlds.

(8) In all worlds where persons are not free or are free only in the compatibilist sense, and in which there is no moral evil.

(10) Our world contains much moral evil.

(11) Therefore, in our world persons are free in the libertarian sense.⁵⁹ Premises

(7) and (10) are not objectionable for Plantinga or any other free will defender, and premises (9) and (11) simply follow from the argument. So, the question is

whether or not (8) is true. In support of (8), Walls writes, “Premise (8)...could be disputed. However, I do not think there is much prospect for coming up with

such a reason. For moral evil is the product of human choices, and if freedom

and determinism are compatible, then God could determine all persons to make only good moral choices.”⁶⁰ Walls argument will prove instructive in two ways.

First, it demonstrates how easy it is to forget the limited scope of Plantinga’s free

⁵⁹ Ibid., 376.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

will defense. Second, it demonstrates why Plantinga's response does little to convince the non-theist that a wholly good omnipotent God might allow horrific evils to exist. We will consider each of these in turn.

It may be true that there is not much prospect for coming up with reasons why God would allow moral evil to exist if freedom and determinism are compatible. But, that has nothing to do with the logical compatibility of the existence of God and the existence of evil, which is precisely what Plantinga has demonstrated with his free will defense. The free will defense does not commit one to believing that libertarian freedom is the only way in which the consistency of the relevant proposition can be demonstrated. As Plantinga points out, "a large variety of *r*'s can plausibly play this role."⁶¹

Even if other explanations are difficult to come by, they simply are not needed to set aside the logical problem of evil. The free will defense, if successful, demonstrate that a set of propositions is consistent. But, if a set of propositions is consistent, then any subset of that set will also be consistent. Plantinga's free will defense demonstrates that the original set was logically consistent. If it turns out that in this world there is no libertarian freedom, then relative to this world we know that the above set is not consistent. But if we remove what generates the inconsistency in this world, libertarian freedom, a subset still remains and because the original set is consistent in some possible world any subset of that set will also be consistent. One's inability to demonstrate that the set is consistent in this world is beside the point when it comes to

⁶¹ Alvin Plantinga, "Ad Walls," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research: A Quarterly Journal* 51, no. 3 (1991): 623.

determining if it is logically consistent. By determining, or even just assuming, that compatibilism is true in this world. But because there is some possible world in which the set is consistent one can know, apart from relying on libertarian freedom, that there is no logical inconsistency between the existence of God and the existence of evil.

To rephrase the above, if the libertarian understanding of freedom does not reflect the way this world is, then clearly the details of the free will defense do not apply to this world. But the defense is not intended to apply to a particular world. If we know that libertarianism is false in the actual in the actual world, the of course that set of propositions is not consistent in the actual world. However, once one removes the false proposition, libertarian freedom, a subset of propositions is created. Because the free will defense demonstrates that the original set is logically consistent in some possibly world, that subset too must be consistent in the actual world.

The nature of such a defense has left some philosophers unsatisfied. John Hick, while agreeing that Plantinga has resolved the logical problem finds his methodology “disquieting.” He writes, “That he should so easily fill a gap in his theodicy by appealing to a mythological idea, on the ground that it is logically possible, emphasizes again the remoteness of Plantinga’s concern from all questions of plausibility and probability.”⁶² The mythological idea Hick is concerned with is Plantinga’s suggestion that natural evil could be the results of the free actions of non-human agents. It does not seem to be the specifics of what Plantinga appeals to that bothers Hick, but instead the strategy that allows

⁶² Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 369

Plantinga to just appeal to some logically possible state of affairs to deal with the problem. It is this feature of a defense, employing propositions that are simply possibly true, that seems to also be one of the more irksome features of the defense in general. While Hick is dissatisfied with how Plantinga “fills the gap,” Mackie is unsatisfied with the response because it conflicts with what he takes to be the actually correct view about human action. He writes, “Since this defense is formally [that is logically] possible, and its principle involves no real abandonment of our ordinary view of the opposition between good and evil, we can concede that the problem of evil does not, after all, show that the central doctrines of theism are logically inconsistent with one another. But whether this offers a real solution of the problem is another question.”⁶³

While it is understandable that one may feel disquieted about the nature of this solution, or simply doubt whether it is a real solution at all, for the most part this misses the point of the defense entirely. This may explain why much of the recent scholarly attention has shifted from the logical problem of evil to the evidential problem. While this new problem is certainly a problem for Christian Theism, it is a different problem. Hick and Mackie, among others, seems to have implicitly expected Plantinga’s defense to do more than he intended it to do. Still, it does seem to be bothersome that one is able to summarily dismiss a problem that seemed, at least initially, intractable. Perhaps one of the causes of this problem is that there is no requirement for Plantinga, or anyone else, to suggest an R that he actually believes is true. Of course he may believe it to be true, but need not. This is what has led many philosophers to find defenses to the problem

⁶³ J.L Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 154.

of evil more irritating than helpful. In what follows I will make a distinction between two types of a defense and show that one of the above worries applies only to one of these types whereas the other is much less likely to result in such dissatisfaction.

Narrow and Broad Defenses

Recall that what distinguishes a theodicy from a defense is that the former attempts to resolve the problem of evil by stating what is actually the case whereas the latter simply offers a solution that is possibly the case. It is with this distinction in mind that most recent discussions of the problem of evil have occurred. However, it seems that Plantinga, among others, has actually been using two senses of defense. It will be helpful to distinguish them clearly.⁶⁴ The first sense of a defense is just what we have seen in action already. This is what I will call a narrow defense, which only employs propositions for the purpose of demonstrating the failure of the problem of evil. To this end, Plantinga's defense works admirably. Mackie claimed that there is an inconsistency between propositions that are central to Christian Theology and the proposition that evil exists. Plantinga then showed that there is a way to resolve the apparent inconsistency and in doing so, answered that logical problem of evil.

⁶⁴ I have been using Plantinga's free will defense to demonstrate the method of a defense in general, what follows should apply to all defenses to the logical problem of evil, not simply Plantinga's.

The proponent of the logical problem of evil is forced to agree that this general strategy is correct.⁶⁵ Recall that the defense Plantinga offers maintains that all one needs to do is provide some possible proposition, R, that is consistent with what we know about God and together entails that there is evil. The task of finding such an R to play that roll seems, to some, to be too easy. However, there seems to be a rule that we can stipulate about R that would go a long way to make a defense less bothersome, and would make that additional proposition much more meaningful. This rule, let us call it the *consistency requirement*, requires that R is consistent with other things the Christian philosopher believes about the actual world. If R is not consistent, then the thoughtful proponent of the logical problem of evil only needs to broaden the original set of propositions to include the other relevant propositions that would generate the inconsistency. For, example, if a Calvinist employed the free will defense; it would be difficult for that same person to satisfy the consistency requirement. On many standard views of Calvinism, human agents do not have libertarian freedom and, because of certain Calvinists assumptions about divine providence, the lack of libertarian freedom is essential to their Christian belief. To respond to such a person, the proponent of the logical problem of evil need only add to the original set of propositions, (1) and (2),

(12) Incompatibilist free will does not exist.

If (12) is added to the original set, then it will not be difficult at all to demonstrate that (5) and (12) are not compatible. This Calvinist would have to give up one of

⁶⁵ Of course agreeing that a strategy is correct is different from believing that Plantinga's R is adequate. One might think that (5) or (6) is impossible, and yet still realize that there may be another proposition that can successfully fill that role.

the two compatible propositions, but because he takes (12) to be essential to Christian doctrine, (5) would have to be rejected. And of course rejecting (5) means that the original logical problem of evil would remain.

I will call a defense that intends to answer the logical problem by only including propositions that satisfy the consistency requirement a *broad* defense. While I am not aware of Plantinga making such a distinction, it seems to be one he is at least tacitly recognizes. We previously noted that Plantinga thinks “R need not be true, or probable, or plausible...” but in that very same essay goes on to write, “Many philosophers endorse a compatibilist analysis of freedom, according to which it is perfectly possible that some of my actions be free, even though all of them are causally determined by causal chains extending back to events entirely outside my control. *And of course if compatibilism is correct, the Free Will Defense fails.*”⁶⁶ We can make sense of this apparent contradiction by employing the distinction between broad and narrow defenses. The free will defense would fail in this instance only if we take it to be a broad defense because, when narrowly construed, the truth of compatibilism does not make incompatibilism impossible. However, if one is offering a broad defense, then he must also take into account everything that he believes and maintain consistency in doing so. If someone believes that incompatibilism is false, as did our Calvinist above, then he will not be able to consistently employ it as part of a broad defense, but that does not mean that the narrow defense fails as well.

⁶⁶ Plantinga, “*Self-Profile*,” 43, 45 (Emphasize added).

It is important to point out that another component of the consistency requirement is that the theists also believe R to be true. There are several options one has when considering the truth of a proposition. One might: believe the proposition to be true, believe it to be false but possibly true, believe it to be possibly true but refrain from any judgement concerning its truth value, and believe it to be necessarily false. Because a broad defense aims to establish a defense to the logical problem of evil by only employing propositions consistent with what the defender actually believes to be true, the defender cannot satisfy the consistency requirement if he actually believes $\sim R$ because that would immediately create an inconsistent set. Additionally, if the defender aims to convince the atheologian that there are good reasons to reject the logical problem of evil, then it would seem slight of hand to appeal to a proposition he believes is only possibly true. It seems this is at the heart of Hick's difficulty of Plantinga's willingness to appeal to the existence of non-human agents to explain the occurrence of natural evil. The simple fact that R is possible is sufficient for a narrow defense, but when giving a broad defense the theist is more likely to convince the atheologian that his defense works if he actually believes R to be true.

All the consistency requirement demands is that the defender does not believe $\sim R$; actually believing R, though helpful, is not strictly necessary.⁶⁷ On any account, if one concerned with giving a broad defense, the first step he must take is to ensure any of the propositions employed in that defense are consistent with his other beliefs. If there is an inconsistency between the free will defense

⁶⁷ It seems like the more one focuses on this second aspect of the rationality requirement, the closer one gets to giving a theodicy. In this dissertation, I will concentrate mostly on the first part of the consistency requirement of a broad defense.

and an essential Christian doctrine, then the defense, broadly construed, fails. However, if the inconsistency involves propositions that are essentially connected to Christianity, then one must decide whether he should reject those propositions to ensure the success of the defense, or maintain those propositions and give up the broad defense.

If the Christian philosopher makes use of a broad defense, then it seems that the atheologian would have reasons to find the defense more to the point. There is a qualitative difference between saying to the atheologian, "This defense demonstrates how the Christian God can co-exist with evil but is also consistent with everything else I take to be true." This approach brings a defense much closer to theodicy because the truth of other propositions becomes relevant, but it does not go as far as theodicy in offering the actual answer to the problem of evil. A broad defense would need to eventually encompass everything that one believes and not just Christian beliefs, but it seems most reasonable to begin the process with those Christian beliefs because they are most closely tied to the free will defense.

As we have seen, an essential feature of the free will defense is the possibility that incompatibilism is true. If there are Christian doctrines that require incompatibilism to be false, then there will be inconsistency between those doctrines and a broad free will defense.

Chapter Four: Does Evil Have Purpose

Inherent in the defense of Christian theism's stance on the compatibility of the co-existence of the God of Scripture and the evidence of evil is the belief that because evil exists God has a purpose for it. There may be divergent and varying views amongst theist as to why God would purposely allow those He has created to suffer, but by the mere fact that they can believe that God has a purpose for evil, the believer is better able to reconcile his thinking and even the experience of his pain with the Christian God.

The problem of evil has been an on-going debate within the philosophical and theistic arenas of great critical thinkers since time immemorial, and although there has been some progress moving the debate forward, I feel fairly confident in saying that this is a problem that will never be solved to the satisfaction of all involved because the opponents on both sides are diametrically opposed to each other as they have their feet firmly planted upon their own world view. This is not to say that the debate should not continue. The theist has an obligation to respond to the atheist who proclaims that God does not exist based on evil that does exist, or for any other reason. We will now take a look at one of the more well known theodicies and defenses in assessing the purpose of evil

The theist has the burden of explaining why it is not illogical to think that the co-existence of God and evil are not incompatible. He rebuts the atheistic claim that

a wholly good and omnipotent God would eradicate evil if He could by his assertion that: God allows evil in this world because He has a morally sufficient reason for doing so. It is from this position that many Christian philosophers have based their theodicy and defense.

John Hick is one of the most influential theistic philosophers of the twenty-first century and as mentioned earlier, is a proponent of the Irenaean theodicy tradition, and an opponent of Augustinian theodicy. He believed and taught that God's morally sufficient reason for allowing evil is for the express purpose of soul making or soul building. Hick's theodicy of soul making is based on the premise that God created Man in his image as told in the Genesis account of creation, but that He did not create him in His likeness; that man gradually becomes created in God's likeness during his life time. He claims that it would not be possible for man to ascend to God's likeness without the existence of evil. He directly rebuts Augustine's premise that God created man good because he says that if man was created good he would have had no occasion to fall. He further disputes many of the commonly held themes emphasized by theodacists in the Augustine tradition, including evil existing as a punishment for original sin, a historical fall, and eternal hell as punishment for sin, and concludes that a different approach is needed.¹

¹ These are not all of the themes Hick criticizes in the Augustinian tradition, but others— Such as evil as non-being, the principle of plenitude, God's goodness as aesthetic rather than relational—are neither essential to Augustine theodicy nor particularly fundamental to many Christians today, and so I have not included them.

Hick describes that there are major differences in the motivating interests of the Irenaean and Augustinian traditions, here he explains:

The main motivating interest of the Augustinian tradition is to relieve the creator of responsibility for the existence of evil by placing that responsibility upon dependent beings who have willfully misused their God-given freedom. In contrast the Irenaean type of theodicy in its developed form, as we find it in Schleiermacher and later thinkers, accepts God's ultimate and omniresponsibility and seeks to show for what good and justifying reason He has created a universe in which evil was inevitable.²

According to this distinction, theodicies following the Augustinian tradition hold a nonconsequentialist account of ethics, whereas those in the Irenaean tradition usually incorporate a consequentialist ethic, as noted earlier, Hick's theology does not incorporate consequentialism.³

Hick says that a second major distinction between the traditions is that the Augustinian tradition sees God's relation to His creation in predominantly impersonal terms, whereas the Irenaean tradition emphasizes the personal relation of God and the creature. In speaking of the Irenaean approach, Hick writes:

According to the Irenaean type of theodicy, on the other hand, man has been created for fellowship with his maker and is valued by the personal divine love as an end in himself. The world exists to be an environment for man's life, and its imperfections are integral to its fitness as a place for soul-making.⁴

² John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1966; Fontana Library Edition, 1975), 262-266

³ John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004, revised and expanded by Crossway Books a division of Good New Publishers)

⁴ Ibid

Adopting Irenaeus' theology to the present day, Hick asks us to conceive of the world as a "Vale of soul-making."⁵ Its purpose is the creation of finite persons who can—and will—freely choose to share in the life of their personal Creator. God did not create us with ready-made moral character, because for character to be valuable it must be developed through experience. So God has created us as morally and spiritually immature creatures, evolved from the lower animals. And with the human race beginning this way, it is no wonder that we should go wrong, for we existed from the first in a "fallen" state and a suffering-filled world. And such a world as we find ourselves in is, Hick insists, absolutely necessary for the perfection of our souls. A pain-free paradise with no difficulties, perils, and hardships would never allow us to learn and to develop, for moral and spiritual growth comes through the facing and overcoming of challenges.⁵

One primary area where these two divergent traditions agree is that in his present state God's purpose is that man not remain in his present condition. They both agree that the conditions and environment in which man exists is used in order that it would have an affect on his character. However, the differences in how and why man is in a "fallen" state, as well how and why his environment is as it is, are major differences that make these traditions inimitable to each other. Hick, referring to and quoting Irenaeus on this issue, states:

⁵ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1966; Fontana Library Edition, 1975), 295. The phrase is borrowed from a poem by John Keats.

Irenaeus himself expressed the point in terms of the (exegetically dubious) distinction between the 'image' and 'likeness' of God referred to in Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness." His view was that man as a personal and moral being already exists in the image, but has not yet been formed into the finite likeness of God. By this 'likeness' Irenaeus means something more than personal existence as such; he means a certain valuable quality of personal life which reflects finitely the divine life. This represent the perfecting of man, the fulfillment of God's purpose for humanity, the bringing of many sons to glory, the creating of 'children of God' who are 'fellow heirs with Christ' of His glory.⁶

Hick sees this notion in the writings of the apostle John in terms of the movement from mere animal life (Bios) to a higher level of existence, namely eternal life (Zoe).⁷ According to Hick, for God to create humans on the first level of life was very easy, but the second stage of the creative process is of a different kind. It cannot be performed by omnipotent power alone, because 'personal life is essentially free and self-directing. It cannot be perfected by divine fiat, but only through the un compelled responses and willing co-operation of willing individuals in their actions and reactions in the world in which God has placed them.'⁸

Those critical of Hick's theodicy on this point question what kind of world God might have created that would be more conducive for this purpose of soul making. David Hume, for example, speaks of an architect who is trying to plan a house that is to be as comfortable and convenient as possible. If we find that 'the windows, doors, fires, passages, stairs and the whole economy of the building was the source of noise, confusion, fatigue, darkness and the extremes of hot and cold' we would have no hesitation in blaming the architect. It would be in

⁶ Ibid, 290

⁷ John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004, revised and expanded by Crossway Books a division of Good New Publishers)

⁸ Ibid, 143

vain for him to prove that if this or that defect were corrected greater ills would result: 'still you would assert in general, that, if the architect had had skill and good intentions, he might have planned such a plan of the whole, and might have adjusted the parts in such a manner, as would have remedied all or most of these inconveniences.⁹

Hick is describing in his theodicy what he believes is the way in which God purposes to lead man from human Bios to that quality of Zoe which we see in Christ. The question we have to ask is not if this is the kind of world that an all powerful and infinitely loving being would create as an environment for his human pets, or is the architecture of the world the most pleasant and convenient possible, but rather is this the kind of world that God might make as an environment in which moral beings may be fashioned, through their own free insights and responses, into children of God.¹⁰

Hume and other critics are confusing what heaven ought to be, as an environment for perfected finite beings, with what this world ought to be, as an environment for beings who are in the process of becoming perfected.¹¹

Therefore, the world in which we live should not be evaluated based on the amounts or depths of pleasure and pain we experience, but rather on the ability or efficacy for which Hick claims for the purpose of soul making.

Hick states that, if our general conception of God's purpose is correct the world is not intended to be a paradise, but rather the scene of history in which human

⁹ Marilyn McCord Adams, *The Problem of Evil, Dialogues Concerning Natural Evil*, (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1990) 170

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004, revised and expanded by Crossway Books a division of Good New Publishers)

personality may be formed towards the pattern of Christ. Men are not to be thought of on the analogy of animal pets, whose life is to be made as agreeable as possible, but rather on the analogy of human children, who are to grow to adulthood in an environment whose primary and overriding purpose is not immediate pleasure but the realizing of the most valuable potentialities of human personality.¹²

Hick's central premise is that evil exists for the purpose of soul making. One of the most difficult tasks for any theodicy is the sheer amount of evil in our world and the seeming meaningless and pointlessness of so much of it. The challenge of this particular theodicy is in responding in an acceptable and understanding way to the question of why there seems to be far more evil in our world than is necessary for character development. First, one wonders how one would know how much evil is needed to achieve the goal of soul making; how does one measure if it is too much? One would necessarily have to be omniscient, omnipotent, and all loving to know the intricacies of such matters.

However, Hick provides an answer in response to this challenge in a way that it may be received. He argues that paradoxically, evil must be so bad and pervasive as to seem inexplicable and dysteleological if we are to grow morally. A world in which suffering only occurred to the extent required for the soul-making of the person afflicted is not one that would evoke compassion and charity, for we would recognize that any suffering that was happening would lead to the good of the sufferer. Only in a world in which this is not so, in which

¹² Marilyn McCord Adams, *The Problem of Evil, Dialogues Concerning Natural Evil*, (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1990) 170

suffering afflicts humans with haphazardness and inequity, sometimes even (temporarily) working against the soul-making of the person afflicted, can soul making truly occur.¹³

A number of philosophers have rebuffed this notion that the amount of destructive and horrific evil in our world is necessary for soul making.¹⁴

One is likely not surprised by this, for if Hick's paradox is correct, it might seem to some that God could have made the world better than it was for the purpose of soul making. Rowe criticizes Hick in more detail as he observes:

It not only seems obvious to us that evil occurs far in excess of what an omnipotent being would have to permit for soul making; it also seems obvious to us that evil occurs far in excess of what an omnipotent being would have to permit for us to be rational in believing that excess evil occurs.¹⁵

Rowe accuses Hick of employing an all or nothing argument, "in which God cannot take away any evil without his purposes being thwarted; but Rowe insists, in actuality there must be some threshold above which more evil is (all things considered) unnecessary, and is it not obvious that our world is above that threshold?"¹⁶ Hick response to Rowe's assertion is that of course it would seem

¹³ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1966; Fontana Library Edition, 1975), 333-36

¹⁴ "Surely an all-wise, omnipotent being could have found some happier middle ground between our present, all too-destructive world, and the 'hedonistic paradise' Hick fears would make us morally and spiritually flabby")David R. Griffin, "Critique [of 'An Irenaean Theodicy']," in *Encountering Evil*, 53-54). Or again: "Our world has the pain and stress needed for spiritual growth, but enough is enough, and it would appear God turned the pressure up so as to destroy some while educating only a few." (Frederick Sontag, "Critique[of 'An Irenaean Theodicy']," in *Encountering Evil*, 57)

¹⁵ Marilyn McCord Adams, *The Problem of Evil, Dialogues Concerning Natural Evil*, (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1990), (William Rowe, *Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A response to Wykstra*), 161

¹⁶ William Rowe, *Paradox and Promise: Hick's Solution to the Problem of Evil. In Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*.

that the evil in the world is greater than is needed for soul making, for it will look that way to us if it is in fact soul making. In challenging Hick, however, it is not clear that for the purposes of soul making evil really should seem like it is above Rowe's threshold. Rowe seems right that there *is* a threshold above which more excess suffering is unnecessary, and there is not an obvious reason why we would not be able to differentiate between this and the lower threshold in which *no* excess suffering occurs. But perhaps we are simply too ignorant of the big picture to know whether or not the evil in the world is, in fact, above Rowe's threshold; so we cannot go from "seems" to "is."¹⁷ If it happens that this is the case, we are left with in a situation in which no amount of evil in the world counts against the existence of God. Under Hick's hypothesis, any amount of evil is compatible with the existence of God—as far as we know, at least.¹⁸ But if we are so ignorant as to not be able to judge whether there is excess evil in the world, what makes Hick confident that we are wise enough to be able to see the purpose of evil in the first place? The very task of theodicy assumes that we have some capacity to make sense of the evil in our world. If this is the case, then why suggest that we do not have the capacity to judge whether evil is truly above Rowe's threshold? If it is not the case (and there is a real possibility that it isn't), then we are probably better off simply adopting "skeptical theism," the position that God does have a morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil, but that we are

¹⁷ Michael Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1982). Peterson covers the general evidential problem of evil on pages 68-70 and the problem about the quantity on pages 70-73.

¹⁸ Stanley G. Kane, "Failure of Soul Making Theodicy." *In International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 6 no 1(Spring 1975), 1-22

unable to discern what they are.¹⁹ Hick's position on our capacity to make judgments about evil seems, at least, unstable.

Having said that, one significant reason that the evil in this world seems so gratuitous is what seems to be the obvious lack of true soul making that actually happens in this world. If the purpose of this world is the making of qualitative souls with Christ like character, it would seem to have failed in its purpose, for most human beings do not leave this world morally perfect, or anywhere near it. Hick, however, offers a resolution to this problem by postulating an afterlife in which all human beings will, in the end, freely come to God. Soul Making may not be completed in this life, but Hick believes that we may have faith that it will in the life, or lives to come. If hell has a place in the soul making theodicy, it is not as a place of eternal torment or separation from God, but as a further place of soul making, until one day all souls have been made perfect and all human beings are all to enter heaven in which we perfectly love each other and our Creator.²⁰

Hick may be right that eschatology is an unavoidable part of the soul making theodicy, and probably of any theodicy. His commitment to universalism, however, has unsurprisingly met much opposition from many Christians. Geivett, for example admits that universalism seems necessary if God's ultimate purpose is soul making, but denies that soul making is God's ultimate purpose, and points out that such a purpose is incompatible with human freedom. He claims that God's purpose is to create free beings who can choose either to accept him or

¹⁹ Stephen Wykstra, *The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of Appearance*, in the *Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

²⁰ John Hick, *The Problem of Evil in the First and Last things*. In the *Journal of Theological Studies*, no 2 (October 1968), 337-63

reject Him—a choice which He will honor by sending them to either heaven or hell.²¹

Even If it is granted that it is God's purpose for all humans to be saved, we must face the objection that universal salvation conflicts with free will. Now, at first glance it seems that so long as making the choices necessary to go through the soul making process remains a possibility for a person, he will (given an infinite amount of time) eventually make them. But John Rist reminds us that character formation goes both ways: having committed a particular sin we may find it harder to act morally in this area because a start has been made in forming a habit.²² This means that a person's continued sin in the afterlife could lead to it becoming increasingly unlikely that he will choose to do good. Even if the probability of his doing good never reached 0, its growing progressively smaller would mean that even over an infinite period of time, the probability of his eventual soul making would still be smaller than 1, and so his salvation would not be guaranteed.²³

²¹ Douglas R. Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993)

²² John Rist, "Coherence and the God of Love, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 23 no 1 (April 1972), 98

²³ If the probability of an event E occurring in a given period of time remains constant, the probability of E occurring at least once over X periods of time can be calculated by multiplying the probability of E not occurring by itself X times (i.e., raising the probability of not-E to the power of X). As X approaches infinity, then the probability of not E approaches 0, and the probability of E 1. Hence, given an infinite amount of time, E would occur; a monkey at a typewriter would eventually type Hamlet, even though his doing so on any particular spurt of typing would be incredibly unlikely. However, in this case, the probability of our hypothetical person's soul making is growing progressively smaller, and so we would not be multiplying (for example) a 0.8 probability of continued sin in a given period by itself an infinite number of times (which would equal 0); rather, we would be multiplying 0.8 by (say) 0.95, and so on and so forth. This would yield a result much higher than 0, meaning that eventual soul making could not be assured.

This scenario only leaves room for two factors: free will and one's own inertia. But some who are skeptical might ask--can it be assumed that these are the only two relevant factors? After all, these same forces are at work in this life, and yet we still seek to save the lost. We may try to help a person entangled in sin by changing her situation, showing her love and compassion, or removing or making less appealing the temptation to sin. If we can do these things to help people in this life escape sin, why can God not do similarly for people in the next? All God has to do they say is to provide countervailing forces that make it so that the probability of people's continued sin does not consistently grow progressively larger. He could do this; perhaps, by periodically changing their situations so as to give them positive moral influences, or by revealing himself to them to a degree that the probability of a person choosing good remained sufficiently constant for that person to eventually do so.²⁴ So although God could not guarantee that person's salvation at any particular time, he could guarantee his *eventual* salvation.

Now, were someone's character to become so corrupt that moral goodness became a psychological impossibility for him; the above scenario could not obtain for that person. But we have no good reason to think that human beings can become so utterly and irrevocably evil that it is impossible for them to choose the good; no matter what situation they are in. Certainly it seems unlikely that,

²⁴ Of Course, in the soul making conception of salvation, this choice would have to be made multiple times. But this does not change the essential nature of the situation.

had he a choice, a God who wished for all to be saved would have created human beings in such a way.²⁵

This discussion, however, raises another possible difficulty with the soul making theodicy, if it is not possible for anyone to become irrevocably evil, is it possible for someone to become irrevocably good? Is the concept of a morally perfect person, one whose character is so constituted that no matter what situation she finds herself in, she will not sin, a sensible one? In my opinion it is not, speaking in terms of the foundation of this particular theodicy. It seems that even the “best person,” were you to put her in a damnable enough situation, would eventually sin. Geivett contends that it is not possible for us to become morally perfected through our own efforts, that the only way that this is possible is through “divine fiat”²⁶ Geivett’s reasons for why God grants this moral perfection (and subsequent salvation) to some and not to others are unpersuasive to most serious thinkers who may also wonder, if God intends to perfect us by divine fiat, why did he not do so to begin with, at the beginning of this life? For many, this is the greatest difficulty with the eschatological dimension of the soul making theodicy.

²⁵ Even if it were possible for human being to become irrevocably evil, God could presumably interfere before the appropriate choice was made that would bring this about (he could do so, for example, by temporarily removing the temptation so sin). And if despite all this, some people became so corrupted as to be beyond redemption, it would probably be better for God to destroy them than let them continue to exist (cf. Hick, *God of Love*, 342).

²⁶ Douglas R. Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick’s Theodicy*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

Hick's eschatological view, in that it raises serious obstacles for theists who holds true to orthodox Christian doctrine, and it's own internal inconsistencies as it relates to free will verses determinism, prompts this response from Feinberg as he writes:

Though it may all sound convincing, I find it fundamentally flawed. It would work if we were talking about compatibilism, because the arguments, circumstances, experiments, etc., that God could bring into our life could eventually decisively incline our wills to choose Him. However, this isn't so with incompatibilism. Incompatibilists don't deny that God can arrange circumstances and give us arguments in favor of a course of action. What they do deny is that any of those factors or combination of those factors can decisively incline the will to choose. If the will is so inclined, it is causally determined and thus, not (incompatibilistically) free. The kind of activity Hick foresees on God's part guarantees that eventually he will persuade us all. With libertarian free will there can be no guarantees. Hence, if Hick is serious about this notion of freedom, he can't guarantee that all souls will be built. If he is serious about maintaining his universalism, he must back down on his notion of freedom. The problem still remains.²⁷

This presents a major problem for Hick in that his soul making theodicy is not logically consistent as it concerns free will and determinism, but it is also fails as it relates to the religious problem of evil in the Christian tradition. Hick's belief that death in this world does not necessarily mean that soul making will end, indicates what sounds like reincarnation. This is a teaching that directly opposes the teachings of Scripture that it is appointed unto man once to die and then the judgement. Further, this theodicy fails because Hick believes that because of God's persistent pursuit of wayward souls that all humans will eventually succumb and become made in God's 'likeness.' It fails here because it completely ignores and disregard the sacrificial death of Christ and the role it has

²⁷ John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2004, revised and expanded by Crossway Books a division of Good New Publishers), 152

as presented in Scripture for man's redemption. Because of Hick's stance on universalism and what seems to be a belief in reincarnation, and other commonly held Christian views, it fails to solve the religious problem of evil. Save for the eschatological dimension, this theodicy presents no logical inconsistencies, and therefore, it does not fail to solve the logical problem of evil.

Chapter Five: The Religious Problem of Evil

In defense of Hick, the goal of his soul making theodicy is not to solve the religious problem of evil. It seems that not many philosophical theists have taken it upon themselves to tackle the religious problem. Alvin Plantinga, who has made invaluable contributions in the theological/philosophical arena on the problem of evil writes in *God, Freedom, and Evil*:

In the presence of his own suffering or that of someone near to him he may find it difficult to maintain what he takes to be the proper attitude towards God. Faced with great personal suffering or misfortune, he may be tempted to rebel against God, to shake his fist in God's face, or even to give up belief in God altogether. But this is a problem of a different dimension. Such a problem calls, not for philosophical enlightenment, but for pastoral care.²⁸

I agree with Plantinga and others that to the suffering soul a theological/philosophical response would likely not serve to help assuage the emotional pain and spiritual questioning that one undergoing it may have. However, I do think that the one offering pastoral care would be better equipped to serve in this area if she has prepared herself with a working knowledge of the foundational principles of the theological/philosophical questions of this debate. I don't mean to say that she should start a group on discussing the finer points of determinism versus free will, or the inconsistencies of various theodicies and defenses. But, I can assure you, because of my experience of being a clinical pastoral counselor myself; I have been asked numerous times from those troubled by suffering "why did God allow this to happen to me"? Inherent in this

²⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 63-64.

question are a lot of other questions such as is God really there; why didn't He prevent this; does God cause suffering and evil?

The pastoral counselor is equipped already to provide Biblically based responses to those in need of soul care. My point is that when a person who has experienced a tragic event in her life, she will have questions and at some point and will seek answers and guidance to help her in reconciling her faith with her experience of suffering. This can likely be accomplished without a detailed discussion of the intellectual aspects of the problem with many who have a mature faith. But I see that the pastoral counselor is in the unique place of having the possibility of assisting those who have little or no faith who question the very existence of God due to their experiences of suffering. With a person in this position the pastoral counselor may require the use of the intellectual aspects of the problem along with Scripture to assist her in guiding that person through the tough theological philosophical questions that her client may have. Initially, scripture alone may not be enough to satisfy someone whose faith, if any at all, is lacking.

Having said that, let's look at what the religious problem of evil entails. The existence of evil and suffering poses a very personal religious and emotional problem for the person who is enduring great trial. For some experiencing great suffering, it may not challenge their belief that God exists, but what may be at risk is their confidence in a God they can freely worship and love, and in whose love they can feel secure.

First, it is evident from scripture that when we suffer it is not unnatural to experience emotional pain, nor is it unspiritual to express it. King David is the perfect example of this as Scripture provides a vivid and expressive account of his reactions to suffering. It is also noteworthy for instance that there are nearly as many psalms of lament as there are psalms of praise and thanksgiving, and these two sentiments are mingled together in many places. The psalmist encourages us to pour out our hearts; and when we do, we can be assured that God understands and is with us in our pain as many Scriptures attest to.

There are certain doctrinal principles that would be beneficial to the believer experiencing suffering and evil. However, the time to familiarize oneself with these principles while in the midst of suffering is not the best time. Although, we can avail ourselves to God's provision for all that happens in our lives at anytime, it is more difficult to do so while our focus is divided on our pain. As believers we will be better able to deal with the suffering that will eventually touch our lives if we have become settled in our thinking and beliefs about God and His purposes are as they are revealed in Scripture concerning: suffering, evil, redemption, mercy, grace, acceptance, and death.

Specifically, the person whose has a Scriptural "big view picture" of God's over all plan and purpose for mankind; one who has a view that agrees that God is sovereign over the lives of men, that His appeal to us is one of love, not fear; that He is with us in suffering in ways that we may not be able to comprehend, and that according to the great truth of Romans 8 that even in severe trial God is working all things together for the good to those who love Him and are called

according to His purpose. (v. 28). This will of course require our trust in Him. In order to build a trusting relationship with God requires the same thing that any other relationship requires, and that is an investment of time spent in reading, study, reflection, and application.

This is not to say that having every thing in place will prevent suffering or prevent a negative reaction to suffering, but it will cause one to be better prepared when impacted by evil and suffering. Though it is with no one's delight when met with suffering, it can be used to build our trust and faith when we opt to respond to it as God would have us to by coming to Him. This is not to say that suffering and affliction are good. In 2 Corinthians 6:10 Paul described himself as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." Contrary to some teaching on this passage, we are not being counseled to rejoice because we are being afflicted, but because in it God can find an occasion for producing good.

For example, the accounts of Joseph and Job who both met with grievous evils and personal suffering in their lives show how they were impacted by their experiences. Joseph gave evidence of how God impacted change for good in his life when after years of unexplained suffering due to the betrayal of his brothers, he was able to say to them, "you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Though God did not cause his brothers to betray him, nonetheless He was able to use it in furthering His intentions.

The Book of Job provides an array of examples in which God brought good from Job's trial. Here we can see the good God effects through suffering in many ways. Some are: to make evident His mercy, faithfulness, power and love in the

midst of circumstances. Suffering can also allow us to give proof of the genuineness of our faith, and even to purify our faith. As in the case of Job, his faith was purified because he received an accurate revelation of God as evidenced in Job 42: 5 where he says “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Job’s experiences opened his eyes more fully to the ineffable holiness of God.

For the Christian, what better reason to rejoice in, not for, suffering if it means the possibility of a greater revelation of God. The knowledge of God is considered by those of orthodox Christian belief to be the chief purpose in life. This is my belief as well. The knowledge of God is an incommensurable good. To Know God, the source of infinite goodness and love is an incomparable good, the fulfillment of human existence. The suffering of this life cannot be compared to it. Thus, the person who knows God, no matter what he suffers, no matter how awful his pain, can still say, “God is good to me,” simply by virtue of the fact that he knows God, an incomparable good.²⁹

²⁹ William Lane Craig, *No easy Answers: Finding Hope in Doubt, Failure, and Unanswered Prayer*, (Chicago: Moody Press), 1990.

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