God and the Problem of Evil: A Reformed Analytic Inquiry

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I argue that a Reformed epistemological approach to the problem of evil is more than sufficient in demonstrating the coherence of theism through logical and probable reasoning. I do this by examining various objections and challenges to theism posited by J.L. Mackie and Paul Draper, and contrast them with reasoning found in the works of Alvin Plantinga and likeminded supporters of the Reformed epistemology using analytic philosophical methodology.
To Jure and Milica Mutavdzija
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Some of the most vexing questions each one of us has to wrestle with are those pertaining to the problem of evil. Evil is something with which we are all familiar. It is constantly lurking in the background of the world in which we live, hurting the innocent and bringing pain to the most vulnerable and gentle of people in society. But what exactly is the problem of evil and for whom? How should we go about seeking some kind of resolution to it? As I see it, the problem of evil is more than simply a problem. It would be more accurate to say that there are various problems surrounding discourse on evil rather than the problem of evil, not only because the amount of evil in the world is so great, but also because there are multiple ways in which people interpret evil and the different perceptions cry out for answers.

Some philosophers see the problem of evil as one belonging to God. How can the classically understood omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient god allow evil to exist in his created universe? This question has been the focus of debate within philosophy of religion for quite some time. Its Western historical written inquiry began with Epicurus sometime in the fourth century B.C.E. and since then has reared its head in the writings of people throughout the modern era such as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and David Hume, not to mention authors in the 20th and 21st century, in the works of Antony Flew, J.L. Mackie, and Paul Draper.

Within analytic philosophy of religion, Christian philosophers have felt the need to engage the most powerful arguments against the existence of God. Taking seriously the undeniable presence of evil in the world, Christian thinkers have responded to attacks on belief in God’s existence with intellectual rigor and creativity. One of the greatest theist voices to enter contemporary dialogues and debates is Christian Reformed philosopher, Alvin Plantinga,
who, according to an article in *Time* magazine, published in April 1980, was said to be the “world’s leading Protestant philosopher of God.” Since the 1960s, Plantinga has had several books published in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of religion. The focus of this thesis will seek to defend a Reformed theistic stance against the most pressing challenges posed by contemporary atheists and agnostics within analytic philosophy of religion.

When analytic philosophers of religion discuss the problem of evil, they typically engage in discussion about whether or not affirmations of the existence of evil and the existence of God are compatible or plausible. Some philosophers have argued that the obviously warranted belief in the existence of evil and belief in an omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent god is incoherent or nonsensical and ought to be abandoned due to an implicit logical contradiction. Such was the case with Antony Flew and his employment of falsification

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1 “Modernizing the Case for God”, *Time*, April 5, 1980.


3 Some Christian theologians and philosophers oppose this description of God, arguing that the properties mentioned above are formulations of Greek thought rather than Hebrew understandings of the divine. For example, in “The Divine Power and the Creature,” Paul Tillich has us consider thinking about God as Being itself:

“With respect to time, omnipotence is eternity; with respect to space, it is omnipresence; and with respect to the subject-object structure of being, it is omniscience. These symbols must now be interpreted. Causality and substance in relation to being-itself were discussed in the symbol of God as the “creative ground” of being, in which the term ‘creative’ contained and transcended causality, while the term “ground” contained and transcended substance.” Linwood Urban and Douglas N. Walton, ed. *The Power of God: Readings on Omnipotence and Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 48. However, throughout this thesis, the concept of God should be understood to possess, among other things, the classical properties based on reasoning articulated by Thomas Williams. “We cannot know what scripture means unless we use reason to separate and distinguish defensible interpretations from indefensible ones. If scripture is interpreted to make God less than the greatest conceivable being or to imply that God is unjust, reason tells us that scripture does not mean that and gives us tools to discern the true meaning.” *Reason and Faith: Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Thomas Williams (The Teaching Company, 2007), DVD.

4 In his chapter entitled “Can God’s Existence be Disproved?” J.N. Findlay states it as such.
theory\textsuperscript{5}, and that of J.L. Mackie.\textsuperscript{6} Although these views held much sway in Western philosophy departments for decades on end in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the debate has continued to remain an open case since the late 1960s. This thesis will briefly map out some of the early analytic developments of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century works of those such as Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein in order to situate ourselves in current Western debates. Hopefully this will prove helpful to understanding the thesis as a whole because the tradition from which Alvin Plantinga, along with his interlocutors engage debate, find their roots in these early thinkers. The primary historical discussion will examine the early and later work of Wittgenstein, mainly because his work is still highly relevant within theological discourse at the Toronto School of Theology, but also because he captures much analytic thought as it progressed during early development. After writing some preliminary remarks about the historical development of the analytic method, I shall then go on to discuss some key concepts that are of utmost importance to understanding Plantinga’s thoughts and refutations. Such concepts include \textit{de re/de dicto} distinctions, possible worlds, and essentialism, to name a few. This exposition will ensure that the thesis will be clear, concise, and intelligible. In addition, I shall also briefly introduce Bayesian methodology, which concerns itself with probability and rational belief. This seems necessary, not because

\textsuperscript{5} For we try to show that the Divine Existence can only be conceived, in a religiously satisfactory manner, if we also conceive it as something inescapable and necessary, whether for thought or reality. From which it follows that our modern denial of necessity or rational evidence for such an existence amounts to a demonstration that there cannot be a God.” Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, ed., \textit{New Essays in Philosophical Theology} (London: SCM Press, 1955), 48.

\textsuperscript{6} According to falsification theory, a concept or proposition is meaningless, if it contains terms that are neither empirically verifiable or tautological in nature. Furthermore, if no criterion upon which to test the veridity of a proposition exists, that is, if there is no criterion to falsify a claim, the claim then must be deemed factually meaningless. For more on this see Antony Flew, \textit{God, Freedom and Immortality: A Critical Analysis}. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1984), p. 13-30.

\textsuperscript{6} J.L. Mackie, \textit{The Miracle of Theism} (New York: Clarendon Press, 1982).
Plantinga believes that rational belief in God is dependent on probability calculus but because he believes that it could prove helpful as a buttress to evidential arguments against theistic attacks.7

A big portion of this thesis will focus on various articles and books beginning from the 1970s and onward to our present time that hold currency within philosophy of religion discourse. Topics covered will predominantly focus on moral evil, that is, evil caused by moral agents (i.e., human beings) as well as natural evil8 (e.g., cancer). Arguments provided by atheist writer J.L. Mackie will be examined as well as agnostic author Paul Draper. The latter two theorists still hold persuasive voices in the field which call out for a response. This thesis will provide an examination of their relevant arguments pertaining to evil, a Reformed response given by Alvin Plantinga, and, in the critical analysis section, a response from myself to the authors and issues discussed throughout.

Various methods have been employed in discussions surrounding the problem of evil. Some methods find their origin in the continental philosophy of German idealism, existentialism, and French postmodernism to name a few. It needs to be stated at the onset of this thesis that the method employed throughout will not be an adoption of such methods of discourse. The method used throughout this thesis will be that which is commonly associated with analytic

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7 "While skeptical of proofs of God’s existence, Plantinga is quite open to probabilistic arguments that show God’s existence to be more likely than not.” James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, eds. “Self Profile,” in Alvin Plantinga, Profiles 5 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), 56.

Analytic theology finds its roots within the analytic tradition of philosophy, which is predominantly used by most Anglo-American university philosophy departments. This is the tradition within which Alvin Plantinga and his interlocutors situate themselves.

In order to gain a better understanding of what this method entails, it is beneficial to shed light on the phrase ‘analytic philosophy.’ Analytic philosophy sometimes refers to a tradition that began with a group of philosophers in the late 1800s that became united under a set of core beliefs about how philosophy ought to be conducted. These core beliefs focused mainly on language and how it can be used as a means to solving traditional philosophical questions such as, “Does God exist?” However, analytic philosophy can also refer to early doctrines within the movement itself. These doctrines include those found among the group commonly referred to as “the Logical Positivists”, commonly associated with thinkers such as Gottlob Frege, Rudolph Carnap, Alfred Tarski, Bertrand Russell, and G.E. Moore. One other very influential early analytic philosopher that came from this time period was a student of Bertrand Russell’s named Ludwig Wittgenstein. No doubt, Wittgenstein’s philosophy has endured throughout time and has shaped the way that many approach analytic theology as a discipline, notably Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, and D.Z. Philips. If we are to better understand the philosophical and theological framework of Alvin Plantinga’s thought, it calls us to briefly touch upon the early and late philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

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Preliminary Remarks: From Wittgenstein to Plantinga

Although there can be much said about modern quantifiable logic that began with Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and others from the Vienna Circle, for the sake of this thesis it seems appropriate to begin our understanding of the analytic tradition with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s early and later philosophy, because his thought encompasses the ideas of those who came before him and because his ideas are still influential in Western learning institutions such as the Toronto School of Theology.

Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Ludwig Wittgenstein was a trail blazing thinker. In his lifetime, he only had one book published entitled the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and the content found in this book brought forth a new system of understanding the world based on prior philosophical developments of both Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege. Wittgenstein sought to put forth a positive philosophy that can be summed up by the opening words found in its preface:

“What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.”

That which we cannot talk about, Wittgenstein classified as the mystical.

It is important to note that within the *Tractatus* the mystical is not said to be non-existent. Rather,


11 Ibid., 3.

12 “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.” Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 89.
that which falls under the mystical domain cannot be critically judged in scientific terms and as a result, is meaningless to discuss.\textsuperscript{13} Only what can be clearly and rationally discussed is classified as the natural sciences:

Propositions represent the existence and non-existence of states of affairs. The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science (or the whole corpus of the natural sciences). Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences. (The word ‘philosophy’ must mean something whose place is above or below the natural sciences, not beside them.)\textsuperscript{14}

With respect to propositions and logic, Wittgenstein writes:

Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses itself in language, we cannot express by means of language. Propositions show the logical form of reality. They display it.\textsuperscript{15}

In other words, propositions are thoughts clothed by language that express states of affairs in the world that are either true or false, but they are not governed by language. Rather, they are governed by logic, mirroring reality, and are only expressed through language. The theory of language asserted by Wittgenstein in the \textit{Tractatus} is commonly referred to as the picture theory of meaning because the propositions clothed by language are said to reflect reality in logical space.

A picture is a fact. The fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way. Let us call this connexion of its elements the structure of the picture, and let us call the possibility of this structure the pictorial form of the picture.\textsuperscript{16}

Wittgenstein’s picture theory of language is useful in understanding analytic theology because it represents a realist view of language and its connection to empirical reality.

\textsuperscript{13} Antony Flew developed this as pertaining to God in his article, "Theology and Falsification," from Joel Feinberg, ed., \textit{Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy}, (Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc.: Belmont, CA, 1968), 48-49.

\textsuperscript{14} Wittgenstein, \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus}, 29.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 31.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 10.
Although Alvin Plantinga does not embrace Wittgenstein’s particular empirical epistemology, he does hold to a critical realist stance, where language about non-empirical entities such as God, angels, and the like, exist not only in narratives of holy texts but also in the actual world, making Godself known to humans through lived experience. This particular analytic method that Plantinga has spearheaded has come to be known as proper functionalism\textsuperscript{17}. More will be said about this later.

Several other key implications of Wittgenstein’s picture theory of language caused great concern to those compelled to maintain rational cognitive discourse about God. Within the \textit{Tractatus}, a picture represents a sense of reality, but if a sentence used to express that reality does not picture anything in the world, as is the case with those pictures that fall under the category of the mystical, then, according to Wittgenstein, it has no sense. And, if the picture cannot represent a state of affairs and has no sense, it therefore follows that it has no meaning. The upshot of this leaves sentences and propositions about metaphysics including God and the self—or the “I”—meaningless.

There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas. If I wrote a book called \textit{The World as I found it}, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc., this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject; for it alone could \textit{not} be mentioned in that book.—The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.\textsuperscript{18}

Moreover, propositions about ethics become non-sense.

The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: \textit{in} it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Alvin Plantinga, \textit{Warrant and Proper Function} (New York: OUP, 1993).

\textsuperscript{18} Wittgenstein, \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus}, 69.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 86.
If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world.

So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher. It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.)

Propositions about religion are also classified as non-sense.

How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself to the world.

Lastly, propositions about philosophy itself are nonsense because philosophy does not picture any states of affairs in the world. Wittgenstein writes:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

It is important to see clearly that Wittgenstein does not see his philosophy, God, ethics, and metaphysics as completely worthless, but rather as lacking a sense in the world because they do not picture anything in the world. According to Norman Malcom, Wittgenstein, himself, was not one who accepted any religious faith but saw it as a form of life that interested him greatly.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 87.

22 Ibid., 89.

23 “I do not wish to give the impression that Wittgenstein accepted any religious faith – he certainly did not – or that he was a religious person. But I think there was in him, in some sense, the possibility of religion. I believe that he looked on religion as a ‘form of life’ (to use an expression from the Investigations) in which he
The picture theory of language was eventually abandoned by Wittgenstein himself and replaced with a use-theory of language found in his posthumously published book, *Philosophical Investigations*\(^{24}\), where he gave reason as to why he rejected his earlier picture theory of meaning. Initially, Wittgenstein took to be true the notion that elementary propositions cannot contradict one another. This was crucial to his logical empiricism found in the *Tractatus*. Propositions have to either be tautologies or they must say something about the world. But the idea of elementary propositions or atomistic propositions\(^{25}\) broke down. Sometimes elementary propositions combine themselves, and the newly formed combined propositions become elementary themselves. So, for example, in the case of colour, red is elementary and yellow is elementary, but the shades between yellow and red when mixed, become new elementary colours themselves.\(^{26}\) In order to move forward, Wittgenstein explored three different paths that led him to abandon (1) elementary propositions altogether; (2) abandon logical atomism, the view that posited basic empirical entities that could not be further broken down (i.e. linguistic atoms); (3) abandon the narrow notion of logic as defined by the negation found in the work of Russell and Frege.\(^{27}\) In the end Wittgenstein argued against fundamental propositional form in *The Blue and Brown Books*\(^{28}\), also published posthumously, which eventually became the body of *Philosophical Investigations*.

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\(^{25}\) “We may then define an atomic proposition as one of which no part is a proposition, while a molecular proposition is one of which at least one part is a proposition.” Bertrand Russell, *Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. VII (New York: Routledge, 2000), 106.


In addition to Wittgenstein’s own critique of the picture theory of language, Peter van Inwagen offers additional insight as to why the picture theory failed.

Pictorial Abstractionism, a theory that no one in fact holds, asserts that worlds represent the way pictures or statues or models or maps do: by some sort of (relatively) nonconventional spatiotemporal isomorphism with the things represented and their spatiotemporal arrangement. But this seems impossible. The map is normally simpler than the territory. If something adequately represented (in the pictorial sense) the universe, it would have to be as detailed in its spatiotemporal structure as the universe. The point is tautological: if it left something out it would leave something out.\(^\text{29}\)

At this point, it is beneficial to examine Ludwig Wittgenstein’s later thought that still holds weight in modern theological discourse, in order to compare and contrast it with Plantinga’s proper functionalism.

Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Investigations

Even though *Philosophical Investigations* was published in 1953, it still has lasting influence on many contemporary philosophers and theologians. Throughout this later work, Wittgenstein moved toward a use-theory of language which stood in stark opposition to his earlier pictorial theory of meaning. Within the use-theory, language itself is said to be inseparably woven into the fabric of life. Wittgenstein’s use-theory removed language from the realm of correspondence to the realm of coherent pragmatism. Within this perspective, language receives its meaning from the way it is used within a community or institution. The employment of this pragmatic truth theory\(^\text{30}\) approach in philosophy certainly has its advantages and strengths when coupled with theology, especially in light of source criticism

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\(^{30}\) For a helpful summary sketch of the different truth models, refer to Susan Haack, *Philosophy of Logics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 86-127.
and the development of Christian doctrine. Narrative theologians Hans Frei and George Lindbeck undoubtedly illuminate its strength in cultural/linguistic methodology in the *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*\(^{31}\) and *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*\(^{32}\). However, within the analytical discourse of philosophers of religion examined throughout this thesis, the pragmatic stance seems to have less force when tackling difficult questions about God’s existence. Arguing for rational belief in God’s existence within a particular linguistic community—say Muslim, Jewish, or Christian—that believes in God, seems weaker than arguments formulated to engage with those who do not belong to such communities, or for that matter, apart from human beings in general (e.g., Did God exist before the first human beings came into existence?). Another approach that must be noted is that which is employed by process philosophers and theologians. Pertaining to the problem of evil, process theorists reject the conventional use of the free will defense that seems to make God ultimately responsible for evil by not interceding from time to time, despite the fact that God is omnipotent. Barry Whitney tells us that

> Process theists insist that the historical formulation of the theodicy problem can be ‘dissolved.’ The traditional discussion has been…. a ‘pseudoproblem,’ perpetrated by a mass of undigested notions too vague or self-inconsistent to permit any useful application of rational argument.\(^{33}\)

Process theology dissolves the problem of evil by denying God’s omnipotence. In doing so it helps us to conceptualize God entering into our suffering as we experience it, which has


sometimes been lacking in older analytic literature. I will address the idea of a suffering God in the critical analysis portion of this thesis.

Alvin Plantinga: Reformed Epistemology

Throughout the past six decades Alvin Plantinga has helped to develop a contemporary analytic approach to theology that has kept in step with classical Western Christianity. In the preface to *Warranted Christian Belief* he writes that his epistemological approach to topics of faith and belief in God follow the traditions of “the main branches of the Christian church, what unites Calvin and Aquinas, Luther and Augustine, Menno Simons and Karl Barth, Mother Teresa and St. Maximus the Confessor…”34 What differentiates Alvin Plantinga from narrative theologians such as Frei and Lindbeck is that his approach to theology and philosophy in general is one of critical realism, that is, one of the three methods that Lindbeck described at the outset of his *The Nature of Doctrine*.35 Plantinga asserts that faith in God or belief in his existence is a cognitive activity, meaning that such propositional beliefs about God have true or false values that are true or false for all communities.

When addressing issues of faith, in keeping with his understanding of John Calvin he writes:

> The first thing to see is that faith...is a cognitive activity. It isn’t *merely* a cognitive activity; it also involves the will, both the affections and the executive function. (It is a knowledge *sealed upon our hearts*, as well as revealed to our minds.) Still, even if faith is *more* than cognitive, it is also and *at least* a cognitive activity. It is a matter of

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35 Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine, 15-29*, Chapter 1 *Theory, Ecumenism, and Culture: The Proposal in Context*. Here, Lindbeck argues that although critical realism is an option with its own strengths, it is not the one he prefers.
believing (“knowledge,” Calvin says) something or other. Christians, on this account, don’t merely find their identity in the Christian story, or live in it or out of it; they believe it, take the story to be the sober truth.  

36 Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 247.
Chapter 3
Methodology
The Logical Problem of Evil

In his book, *God and the Problem of Evil* 37, William Rowe describes the problem of evil as the logical inconsistency of the propositions “God exists” and “Evil exists”. To many, these two propositions seem contradictory, but in order for the contradiction to surface “one must find another proposition that is necessarily true and use it along with one of the original pair to deduce the explicit denial of the other member of that pair.” 38 (emphasis added) To simplify, Rowe has us imagine the following analogy:

Say, someone wants to prove the propositions “This object is red” and “This object is not coloured” are logically inconsistent. In order to counter this argument one could argue that it is necessarily true that red is a colour and “Whatever is red is coloured”. From there, one can prove that “This object is red” and “This object is not colored” is logically inconsistent because anything red is necessarily coloured.39

This simple case about colours shows us how a problem about logical inconsistency is settled. The question to be explored in this thesis is, is “God exists” and “Evil exists” like “This object is red” and “This object is not coloured”?

One of the most powerful voices within Western philosophy to argue the logical inconsistency of “God exists” and “Evil exists,” comes from J.L. Mackie in his article *Evil and Omnipotence*40. In order to understand the full force of his argument, we shall need to spend a fair bit of time exploring it in detail. It is necessary to do so because, as is the case


38 Ibid., 75.

39 Ibid., 75.

with most—if not all—analytic philosophy, the smallest details can either make or break a position or contention. Sometimes an argument may appear compelling only until a major flaw is exposed in the fine details.

**Concepts Pertaining to Proper Functionalism**

As an essentialist, that is, one who adheres to the view that for any entity there exists a set of properties or attributes that are necessary for its existence, Plantinga is keen to make the distinction between modality *de re* and modality *de dicto*. This modal distinction dates back to the work of Aristotle in his *Prior Analytics* i, 9. Quoting Aristotle, Plantinga writes in a given syllogism, “It happens sometimes that the conclusion is necessary when only one premise is necessary; not, however, either premise taken at random, but the major premise.”

*De dicto* propositions predicate a modal property of another proposition, whereas *de re* propositions are essential to an entity. This is to say that some truths about a given entity are necessary, while others are contingent. A necessary truth about an entity \( p \) is one where if it were to be denied the entity could not be what it is said to be. In other words, \( p \) is necessary if and only if its denial is impossible.

Plantinga makes it clear that notions of necessity, contingency, truth, and the like are all properties of propositions, not sentences. In his account, propositions are said to be truth-bearers. They are to what sentences, either uttered or inscribed, refer. The proposition *Snow is White* can be expressed through sentences in English i.e. “Snow is white”, or

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German “Schnee ist weiß”. For Plantinga propositions are non-linguistic and are grasped by our minds and have the potential to become verbalized through utterance or inscription.

Broadly logical necessity (BLN) is a concept for which Plantinga argues as well. BLN refers to “truth in all logically possible worlds.” In order to grasp the method in which Plantinga employs, something must be said about possible worlds. In chapter four of *The Nature of Necessity*, Plantinga address the concepts of possible worlds, books and essential properties. A possible world is a possible state of affairs, that is, a way the world could have been. So, for example, in a possible world, Donald Trump could have been the Prime Minister of Canada instead of the President of the United States. In a possible world Wayne Gretzky could have been a Russian poet. All these are possible states of affairs. However, the range of what can exist in a possible world, broadly logically speaking, is limited. In no possible world is the Prime Minister a prime number. In no possible world is a number a human being, and in no possible world was there a time when there was space, but no material objects. A helpful concept when thinking about possible worlds is the concept of a book as it applies to a possible world. Each possible world has exactly one book, and that book contains every true and false proposition pertaining to that world. So in World 1 (w1) at Time 1 (t1), say, proposition \( p \), “Diane and Mary Ellen are baking a pie”, is true. It is always true in that possible world. Perhaps, in a different possible world, say (w2) at time 1 (t1),

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45 Ibid., 2.

46 Ibid., 47.
they are not baking a pie but rather baking bread. But in w1 at t1 they are baking a pie.

Another important concept to highlight is the idea of the actual world (a). The actual world is obviously the world in which we actually exist, but when discussing possible worlds it is important not to think of every possible world as the actual world. There is only one actual world in a given set of possible worlds.47

In the above cases, the property bonded to a given entity is said to be necessary or essential to its existence. So, for example, if every human being is necessarily rational no further argument needs to be given to show the link between rationality and being human, for if a human being did not have rational power, he or she would not be human. Therefore the expression, humans are rational animals, is to be taken de re and not de dicto in all possible worlds.

The distinction between de re modality and de dicto modality does not only apply to essential properties of a given object. It would help us understand the disconnectedness between our beliefs about what is said of an entity and the reality of it. To show this, we can refer to the influential paper Sense and Reference48 written by Gottlob Frege. Frege tells us how at one point in time people observed the first star seen in the sky as the morning star and the last star seen in the sky at night as the evening star. Sailors at that time believed that both the morning star and the evening star were two different stars. So, de dicto, two different stars were said to exist. However, it was discovered later that what was thought to be the morning star and the evening star was really the planet Venus. Even though the sailors said (de dicto)

47 Ibid., 47.

that Venus was the morning star and the evening star, the object in the sky being referenced was really one in the same object, that being the planet Venus (de re). Understanding the de re/de dicto distinction is helpful because it allows us track entities, when we discuss possible worlds and the existence of God.

The Evidential Problem of Evil

The evidential challenge to the existence of God that we shall analyse later employs Bayesian probability. Probability can be thought of and used in two different ways. If we repeat an experiment many times over, the percentage of successful outcomes yields a frequentist probability. (i.e., Rolling a six sided di and calculating that the probability of rolling a 3 is one in six.) But there is a second way people use probability. When we ask a question pertaining to the likelihood of an event that took place in the past, such as the time period in which dinosaurs roamed the earth, or the likelihood of the existence of something, we do not think in terms of a repeatable experiment, but rather a weighted assessment of possibilities. Bayesian probability concerns itself with this kind of reasoning. It is an approach to knowledge that revises an assessment as evidence is amassed. In other words, it helps us express quantitatively our degree of belief in a statement. Although Alvin Plantinga does not contend that one’s belief in God’s existence is based on epistemic Bayesian probability, he does state its uses. In Faith and Rationality he writes, “One could …give a probabilistic or inductive argument for the existence of God, thus showing that theistic belief is rational, or epistemically proper, in that it is more likely than not with respect to the deliverances of reason”. Deliverances of reason, here, refer to those faculties we possess that produce true

beliefs within us. To avoid asking the skeptical question “how do we know?” *ad infinitum*
with respect to any knowledge claim, the deliverances of reason give us a starting point to
make such a claim with confidence.\(^{51}\) In *Perceiving God*, William Alston contends that
mystical experiences can constitute valid perceptions of God. In the absence of a defeater
argument, Alston argues that the Christian is in his or her epistemic right to believe divine
perceptions, true because all perceptive experiences are circular to some extent. For
example, to show that sense perception is reliable, one needs to make predictions that rely on
sense perception to determine that the predictions are fulfilled. Therefore, perceiving God
should not require the theist to give a transcending reason for understanding his or her
mystical experience to come from God.\(^{52}\)

According to his proper functional Reformed epistemology, Plantinga contends that belief in
God is first and foremost, “properly basic”. Properly basic beliefs are those beliefs that
naturally arise in us that are not inferred from argumentation. They range from highly
individualized beliefs about our personal experience (i.e., what I had for dinner last night) to
widely accepted beliefs such as belief in the physical world and, for Plantinga, belief in God.
\(^{53}\)

\(^{50}\) Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*
(Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 70. For more in depth analysis of the deficiencies with
the Baysian approach to epistemology see chapter 8, *Epistemic Probability: Some current views* in Plantinga,
*Warrant and Proper Function*, 137-142.

\(^{51}\) For an account of the circularity for epistemic certainty refer to R.M. Chisholm, *The Problem of the


not everybody knows what I had for dinner last night). However, in the absence of a defeater argument one is entitled to hold to his or her properly basic beliefs.

In order to understand Bayesian probability, several details must be provided by those who employ this method of argumentation. Firstly, it must be clear what all the possibilities are within the argument itself. With respect to what we are warranted in believing, we must responsibly consider the various potential states of the world and assign relative probabilities of the different states, as though each state is the correct one. The sum of all the probabilities needs to equal 100%. As new evidence is gathered, the *a priori* assumption of whether or not a proposition is true will change according to the likelihood of one belief being true over and above another. So, for example, say that a random person named John got off the subway at St. George station to visit Knox College. If we were to guess whether or not John has a Texan accent, we might say that the probability is relatively low, let’s say a 10% (1/10) chance because most people that come off that stop do not have a Texan accent. But if we were given additional information beforehand that John just got off a plane that left from Texas before riding the TTC subway, our *a priori* assumption would change to much higher probability that John has a Texan accent, let’s say 70% (7/10). If we also are given information that John grew up in the south, our epistemic probability would increase all the more. This is how Bayesian probability functions when it comes to a proposed hypothesis.

There is, however, somewhat of a challenge to quantifying *beliefs* within the Bayesian method. Unlike frequentist numerical assignment to the chance of rolling a 3 on a six sided die, truth claims about beliefs are not easily quantifiable. Therefore we must distinguish between the proper use of numerical probability and epistemic probability. Paul Draper offers help in stating:
[S]ince multiplication and addition can only be performed on numbers, it follows that ...[a given] theorem presupposes that probabilities have numerical values. But most epistemic probabilities have only comparative values. This difficulty can be overcome by interpreting the claim that this theorem is true for epistemic probability as the claim that (i) if each of the probabilities in the theorem have numerical values, then the theorem states the numerical relationships which hold between them, and (ii) if at least one probability in the theorem does not have a numerical value, then all statements of comparative probability entailed by that theorem are true.\footnote{Paul Draper in Rowe, \textit{God and the Problem of Evil}, 200.}

With respect to belief in God, Bayesian probabilities are ascribed to argumentation for God’s existence based on the amount of evil observable in the world. This will be further explored later in this paper.

\textbf{Defining Rational Discourse}

Alvin Plantinga upholds a foundational view of rationality. It is important not to confuse his foundationalism with the classical foundational epistemology of say, Thomas Aquinas or Rene Descartes. Classical foundationalism asserts:

\begin{quote}
[S]ome propositions are properly basic and some are not; those that are not are rationally accepted only on the basis of \textit{evidence}, where the evidence must trace back, ultimately, to what is properly basic. The existence of God, furthermore, is not among the propositions that are properly basic \textit{[in Classical foundationalism]; hence a person is rational in accepting theistic belief only if he has evidence for it.}\footnote{Alvin Plantinga, \textit{Faith and Rationality} (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1991), 48. For more on the topic of God and properly basic beliefs see “Is Belief in God Properly Basic?” Alvin Plantinga, Noûs, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1981 A. P. A. Western Division Meetings (Mar., 1981), 41-51.}
\end{quote}

According to Plantinga, the problem with classical foundationalism is that it asserted that belief in God is not properly basic, but rather grounded in an incorrigible belief, that is, a belief where a person could not be mistaken (e.g., Bachelors are unmarried), or a belief that is evident to the senses (e.g., water boils at 100 degrees Celsius). Since belief in God did not
fall into either category, nor could it be derived from them, belief in God is said to be non-rational.

While remaining a “foundationalist” at the core, rather than having true belief in God rest upon incorrigible beliefs or those of empirical nature, Plantinga’s proper functionalism places belief in God as one that is properly basic. Another key concept to keep in mind throughout this paper is that of noetic structure. A noetic structure is “the set of propositions [a person] believes, together with certain epistemic relations that hold him and these propositions together.” There are four basic characteristics of a noetic structure: (1) It includes the complete set of beliefs of a particular person. (2) It is characterized by the way its beliefs are internally related for that person. (3) It includes differing degrees of tenacity with which beliefs are held. (4) It is constituted by some beliefs which are central and intrinsic in their relationship to the whole of the structure, and others at the periphery with little relationship to the rest.

Now that a methodological framework has been established as terms for argumentation we turn to the logical problem of evil as stated by J.L. Mackie and the free will defense of Alvin Plantinga.

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56 Ibid., 48.

Chapter 4

Critical Examination

The Logical Challenge

 Evil and Omnipotence

In Evil and Omnipotence, Mackie argues that in order to believe in God, one ought to be able to rationally support it. Rationality presupposes logic and so he makes it his mission to find logical contradiction between the existence of evil and the essential traditional theological doctrines that are said to apply to God. Mackie’s strategy is to place the theist in a position where he must be “…prepared to believe, not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be disproved from other beliefs that he also holds”\textsuperscript{58}

It is obvious that the propositions “God exists” and “Evil exists” hold no explicit contradiction. Mackie’s goal, therefore, is to find an implicit one. An implicit contradiction found within an argument is one that can be teased out through the addition of further propositions that can be deduced by necessity upon further examination of the subjects and objects in question. What both the theist and non-theist agree upon are the following propositions:

(1) God is omnipotent.
(2) God is wholly good.
(3) Evil exists.

How is the theist to respond to these claims? On the one hand, good is opposed to evil in that anything good is moved to eliminate evil as far as it can, and, if a being is all powerful, there is no limit to what that being can do. Would it not make sense for a being like God to do

\textsuperscript{58} J.L. Mackie in Rowe, God and the Problem of Evil, 77.
away with evil throughout his creation? Mackie suggests that the only way out for the theist is for him to limit the terms used within the stated propositions.

If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you.\textsuperscript{59}

Simplified, if the theist changes the definitions of the traditional attributes ascribed to God, he is able to make a case for himself. However, if the theist claims that evil is an illusion due to temporality or that evil is merely disordered harmony not understood, deeming partial evil as good, then a case might be made for theism and Mackie’s argument will not apply. However, Mackie finds arguments such as these weak, committing something like what G.E. Moore coined the naturalistic fallacy. The Naturalistic fallacy treats the ethical term “good” as if it were the name of a natural property, simple and unanalyzable, incapable of being defined. Stating something like “Good means pleasure” commits the naturalistic fallacy because it makes the question “Is everything pleasurable good?” open ended and meaningless. Good cannot be defined in terms of something else including something supernatural such as “What God wills”. The question, “Is what God wills good?” seems to be open ended and meaningless just like the one about pleasure, and so, commits the naturalistic fallacy.\textsuperscript{60}

So, if evil is an illusion, then it would follow that the illusion itself is evil needing to be accounted for, and the same could be said about disorder in harmony. Partial evil is still evil. This, in turn, still leaves the theist in a predicament.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 77.

Fallacious Solutions

Mackie identifies and examines four fallacious solutions to the problem of evil that were proposed in the past. In each case he finds that the solutions contending for theism give up one or more constituent propositions (i.e. God is omnipotent, God is wholly good, evil exists).

[T]he supposed solution moves to and fro between, say, two of the constituent propositions, at one point asserting the first of these but covertly abandoning the second, at another point asserting the second but covertly abandoning the first.61

The following solutions often presented are such:

(1) “Good cannot exist without evil” or “evil is necessary as a counterpart to good.”

Mackie points out that this response is inadequate because it sets a limit to what God can do, that being that God has to create evil in order to create good, which entails that God is not omnipotent or that he is limited to what he can do.62 What is meant by omnipotence seems to place a limit on what is logically impossible. The upshot of this for the theist is that he cannot hold to the belief that God is truly omnipotent, because omnipotence means the power to do what is logically possible. If one argues that evil is necessary as a counterpart to good, the theist is in a similar predicament. Unless he is willing to concede that God can do what is logically impossible, he cannot consistently hold to the view that God does not arbitrarily choose what is good or evil. Mackie identifies this argument as “…inconsistent with the view that God is bound by logical necessities…,”63 which generally has been accepted as a non-controversial point, because logic itself is said to be created by God. A second reason

61 Rowe, God and the Problem of Evil, 80.
62 Ibid., 80.
63 Ibid., 81.
why Mackie rejects the reason evil exists as a necessary counterpart to good is because, if good and evil are counterparts, then a good thing will not eliminate evil as far as it can. The problem with this relative way of looking at the world is that good and evil become extrinsic properties of the world similar to greatness and smallness, says Mackie.

In this sense greatness is not a quality, nor an intrinsic feature of anything; and it would be absurd to think of a movement in favour of greatness and against smallness in this sense. Such a movement would be self-defeating, since relative greatness can be promoted only by a simultaneous promotion of relative smallness.64

Greatness and smallness, in this argument, are relative to one another. But greatness and smallness can also be thought of in an absolute sense. In the absolute sense, Mackie thinks that there would be nothing illogical about everything in the universe being small or great, because in an absolute sense they are not logical counterparts. Either way, whether in the relative or absolute sense, greatness and smallness does not seem to be analogous to good and evil because greatness and smallness attack each other in the same way that good and evil do.65 Evil is not a logical opposite. If evil is a privation of good, then there is no reason to think that everything cannot be good. If that were the case, we would not notice that everything was good, but that would not be a problem. It would be like living in a world where everything is red, and we would simply not notice that everything is red.

The last point that Mackie addresses on the “good cannot exist without evil” argument is that God might place just enough evil in the world to serve as a counterpart for good. This may sound feasible, but Mackie thinks that it is failure due to the fact that it is difficult to argue

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 82.
that, in all contexts, the evil that occurs is minute and a necessary dose.\textsuperscript{66} How are we to balance the evil we see with its necessity? Mackie’s point is that we simply cannot.

(2) “Evil is necessary as a means to good”

Mackie contends that evil as a necessary means to good has little plausibility, because it seems to restrict God’s power. Causal laws tell us that certain ends cannot be achieved without certain means, but this would entail that God is subject to at least some causal laws and this would seem to interfere with God’s omnipotence. Moreover, God being subject to causal laws would then be an indication that causal laws are not themselves made by God. If God could bind himself to his own laws then it would be more plausible that evil is a necessary means to good, but then God could no longer be said to be omnipotent.\textsuperscript{67}

(3) “The universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil.”

This argument, Mackie thinks, may seem to hold weight because the contrasts between good and evil may heighten beauty in the universe as a whole, similar to dissonance and consonance found in music. It may also be said that a static good universe may be less desirable than a progressive universe that gradually overcomes evil because the latter would prove to be the eternal unchallenged supremacy of good. The argument does gain traction, but only because it assumes that the problem of evil is primarily about physical evil or pain. So, if the problem of evil is about pain or physical evil, such as disease, then such evil makes possible the existence of sympathy, benevolence, heroism, and reform to overcome evil,

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 83.
giving rise to pleasure and more importantly spiritual goods.  However, in the end, Mackie responds to this line of arguing by distinguishing between first and second order evil from first and second order goods. Pain and misery can be classified as a first order evil and a first order good can be said to include pleasure and happiness. A second order good is that which emerges from a complex situation in which a first order evil “is a necessary component – logically, not merely causally, necessary.” How this happens is not of importance as long as it results in the heightening of happiness by the contrast with misery. Second order goods would include sympathy with suffering, heroism, and a decrease in first order evil. In the end, over the long run, Mackie points out that it may seem that an omnipotent God would be justified in allowing evil in order to bring about even a third order good, that being God’s overall goodness in the best of all possible worlds. However, this approach to the problem of evil fails, inevitably, for if one argues that second order goods such as benevolence make a stronger argument for the goodness of God, one then argues for derivative value that would only aim the subject towards happiness. It then seems absurd for misery to be kept in existence so that heroism or whatnot could come into existence to bring about the first order good of happiness.

The second problem with the argument about first and second order goods is that it may lead to the belief that God is not as concerned with minimizing first order evils but rather only to
promote overall goodness. This would diminish the view of God as a supremely sympathetic or omnibenevolent being.\textsuperscript{71}

The third problem with this argument, says Mackie, is that it does not take into consideration second order evil. Contrasting with second order goods follows malevolence, cruelty, callousness, cowardice and states that increase evil. If God was omnibenevolent and omnipotent he would certainly desire to eliminate them as well. It would not make sense for increased second order goods to lead to third order goods only to have second order evils lead to third order evils and so on, leading to an infinite regress.\textsuperscript{72}

(4) “Evil is due to human free will”

This last argument that Mackie analyzes shifts the focus of evil from God’s problem to a problem stemming from human beings. Free will allows humans to act in conflict with God just as free will allows humans to act in accordance to God’s will. As a result, second order evils such as cruelty are ascribed to humans making God not responsible for them.\textsuperscript{73} The argument is further upheld by treating human free will as a third order good. A world containing human free will may be preferred over one where humans live as “innocent automata, acting rightly in a wholly determined way.”\textsuperscript{74} Mackie’s response to this line of arguing is as follows: Firstly, second order evils are brought about by free will. Secondly, if God could have created free will humans that sometimes chose to do good and sometimes evil, then why could he have not created free will humans that always choose to do good?

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Since logic does not run counter to humans always choosing to do good, why did God not simply create only humans that freely choose to do good? Mackie concludes that God’s “failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.” 75

Mackie thinks that the word freedom is most frequently taken to mean one of two things. When applied to free will it can mean complete randomness or it can mean indeterminacy. If the former definition holds, it seems that human actions would not be determined by human character. But if this is the case, then why would human beings be at fault for their wrong choices, following that their will is based on complete randomness? If humans act out randomly, then it seems that their freedom is not a product of their will. Mackie then asks why free will is such an important good. 76 For all the evil that enters the world because of it, one might wonder why a world without it would be less preferable.

Finally, Mackie finds the notion of an omnipotent God and free will creatures as being somewhat incompatible, because once a creature is endowed with free will, God no longer has control over that creature’s will. If God is said to merely refrain from controlling their wills, one might ask why God does not intervene, when he sees freewill creatures using their free will to do evil? Mackie calls this the Paradox of Omnipotence. It is one thing for humans to create something which they cannot control, but not an omnipotent being. If a human creates a machine it can determine its way of acting by selecting materials and foreseeing the machine’s actions. Since God is omniscient and he is in total control of creation, it follows that he should be able to foresee how humans will act. Furthermore, if he

75 Ibid., 86.
76 Ibid.
is omnipotent, then he should be able to intervene to control their evil actions. This point introduces a second paradox for Mackie, one he calls the Paradox of Sovereignty: “Can a legal sovereign make a law restricting its own future legislative power?” If one answers “yes” to the paradox, then one is forced to admit that the validity of the law would revoke the sovereignty that established the law. If answered “no,” then it implies that there is a law that is logically plausible but makes the parliament in the present not legally sovereign. Laws can be broken up into first and second order laws, that is, first order meaning laws made by a sovereign and second order, meaning laws about laws. Sovereignty can also be discussed in terms of first and second order. First order sovereignty may have limited present sovereignty at a given time and second order may have unlimited authority. An absolute sovereignty might have the ability to take away the sovereignty of a present sovereignty, but could not take away its own sovereignty at a given time. These two paradoxes, that of omnipotence and that of sovereignty, place the theist in a difficult position. The theist might look for a solution by placing God outside of time making his overall power something absolute rather than temporal, but the problem of free will, Mackie says, cannot be saved this way because an omnipotent God should not be able to bind himself by causal or logical laws.

**God, Freedom, and Evil**

In his book, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Alvin Plantinga begins his examination of the logical problem of evil in relation to the existence of God by reflecting on the different kinds of evil

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77 Ibid., 88.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 89.
found in the world, evil that is found in shame, anguish, rage, anxiety, fear, and despair; evil found in poverty and toilsome labour; natural evils such as earthquakes, tidal waves, diseases; and finally evil brought about by human immoral action. His goal is to give an answer as to how these evils can be possible in light of God’s existence, and he does so by answering several straightforward questions from a Reformed Christian stance. Evil obviously exists and God opposes it. Since this is the case, we ask why, if God is omnipotent and all good, does God not do something about it? Plantinga’s approach to answering this question is to first examine the idea of a theodicy. A theodicy is a positive account of why God actually allows evil to exist. Plantinga admits that there are not any compelling theodicies that give answer as to why God allows evil to exist, but, he also does not think that failure to provide a positive account of this leads to the nonexistence of God. He concedes that, like Job in the Bible, we are simply not in a good position to say why God permits evil. What is worth noting, however, is that just because an interesting psychological fact about humans is that we do not know the reason why God permits evil to take place, such a fact has little relevance to the rationality of belief in God. To elaborate on this, Plantinga offers a case where a person is certainly part of an unraveling of events but cannot give account for the specific details. His example consists of a person named Paul deciding to mow the lawn. There is a complex group of bodily movements involved in mowing the lawn, but what exactly is the connection between his decision and the bodily movements? Does Paul’s conscious decision cause the movements, and if so, how? It would appear that the decision to mow the lawn took place way before Paul set foot on the grass. In order to find out what sorts of events make up the causal chain we should ask, does the chain have a

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80 This point is further explored in a later section of this paper with respect to evil and probability.

81 Plantinga, God, Freedom, and Evil, 10.
first event? Since there are whole series of bodily movements involved in mowing the lawn, we should ask, how is the decision related to each individual motion? Plantinga’s point is that no one really knows the answer to the questions, but not knowing the answer does not entail irrational or unreasonable belief that the decision has something to do with the series of motions.82 Just as it is interesting that there is an obvious connection between Paul’s conscious decision to mow the lawn and the physical outworking of the event, and that we do not know the connection in its entirety, so too is it interesting that there may be a connection between us not knowing the causal events between every evil and their outplay. In the end, our ignorance does not prove the existence or nonexistence of God, and for one to believe in God’s existence without justification for every occurrence of evil certainly does not make him or her irrational.

More needs to be done on the atheist’s account. What the atheist needs to do is illustrate that it is impossible or unlikely that God should have a reason for permitting evil. He can do this by extracting a contradiction between an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient God, and the existence of evil just as J.L. Mackie had attempted in Evil and Omnipotence. So the question to wrestle with is, did Mackie successfully find a logical contradiction among the attributes of God and the existence of evil? Plantinga does not think so, and with good reason. Mackie’s charge is that belief in God is irrational in that there is an inconsistency within the belief, but Plantinga is suspicious of this claim.

In order to thoroughly examine the nature of contradictions within a proposition, Plantinga elucidates the term “contradiction” by discussing explicit and implicit contradictions. For an

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82 Ibid., 11.
argument to contain an explicit contradiction, one of the conjunctive proposition denies or negates the other proposition. i.e. Paul is a good tennis player, and it is not the case that Paul is a good tennis player. Mackie’s argument against theism is not of this sort. The claim that God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and that evil exists does not yield an explicit contradiction. To elaborate, we do not find the propositions,

(1’) God is not omnipotent.
(2’) God is not wholly good.
(3’) There is no evil.

anywhere in the argument.83 So, since neither (1’), (2’), or (3’) are part of the argument, there are other ways a contradiction might emerge, and one of them is if the argument is formally problematic, Let us say, George is older than Paul, Paul is older than Nick, and George is not older than Nick. Here, the laws of logic do not yield a contradiction, however, as a necessary truth84 it would have to be the case that George be older than Nick, if Nick is older than Paul. Formally speaking, this type of contradiction is also not found within the initial argument for God’s existence.

Next, Plantinga examines the argument against God’s existence by inspecting it for implicit contradictions. An implicit contradiction is one where a set of beliefs in conjunction with a necessary proposition yields an inconsistent contradictory set using the laws of propositional

83 Ibid., 13.

84 A proposition is necessarily true if it is impossible for its negation to be true. Plantinga labels these as “broadly logical necessity”. Another kind of necessity is a causal or natural necessity that, while not a necessary truth in a broadly logical sense, is still impossible causally or naturally e.g., A human being swimming the Atlantic. Plantinga, God, Freedom, and Evil, 15.
logic and quantification theory.\textsuperscript{85} Mackie’s claim is that the set including God’s omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and the existence of evil yields contradiction.

[T]he contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms ‘good’ and evil’ and ‘omnipotent.’ These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.\textsuperscript{86}

The problem that arises within Mackie’s argument revolves around his ‘additional premises’ and ‘quasi-logical’ rules. Mackie added the following propositions:

(4)\textsuperscript{87} A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.

(5) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.

It is important to note that proposition (5) must include not simply truths, but necessary truths, truths such as, necessarily, there are no square circles.\textsuperscript{88} If the theist argues that God can do that which is logically impossible, what results is the loss of coherency, and discussion on the topic is rendered meaningless, because reasonable arguments can no longer be employed. In other words, reason presupposes logic.

Plantinga’s aim is to show, step by step, why Mackie’s additional propositions are not necessarily true. He first attacks (4). Does every good thing always eliminate every evil state of affairs that it can eliminate? In his example, Plantinga describes a person he names Paul, driving on a wintry day, who runs out of gas on a deserted road. The temperature drops

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\textsuperscript{85} For a good introduction to propositional logic and quantification theory see Symbolic Logic Irving Copi (5\textsuperscript{th} edition). For more on the historical development of modern logic see Jennifer Fischers, \textit{On the Philosophy of Logic} (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2008).

\textsuperscript{86} Rowe, \textit{God and the Problem of Evil}, 93.

\textsuperscript{87} The proposition numbers (i.e. (4) ) used to organize propositions in this document have been altered from the primary sources for clarity purposes.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 17.
to -10 degrees. Twenty-five miles away, you are at home in front of a fire. In your garage sits your car with a full five-gallon can of gas you keep for emergencies. In this example, Paul’s discomfort and danger is an evil, and you could eliminate it but you do not do so because you lack knowledge of the event.

The point of this example is to highlight that (4) by itself is not a necessary truth. In other words, you do not forfeit the claim of being good because you lacked knowledge of Paul’s plight. Ignorance does not make persons evil. So, (4) is in need of revision. Plantinga makes the following revision to charitably move Mackie’s argument further:

\[(4a) \text{ Every good thing always eliminates every evil that it knows about and can eliminate.}\]

This certainly is an improvement on (4) but, is it still a necessary truth? According to Plantinga, it still is not. Suppose the above example of Paul out on the road was somewhat different. What if Paul was still stuck on the road and you did know about it. But, you also know that you have another friend also stuck on a different road, and you are unable to rescue both. In other words, you can save one friend but not both. It would not be fair to impute blame on you in such a scenario because you were limited in power. So, thus far, Plantinga is successful at demonstrating that (4a) is not a necessary truth.\(^89\)

A second example Plantinga offers, in the spirit of Boethius\(^90\), is the following: You get a painful bruise while rock climbing. The doctor predicts that the pain will leave in a few days. Nothing can be done to remove short term pain other than amputate the leg. Certainly, the doctor can remove the evil state of pain, but that would entail bringing about a worse

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\(^90\) Boethius argued that God allows some evil in the world to bring about greater good.
state of affairs in the long run. The doctor is not said to forfeit being called good because he choose not to amputate.\textsuperscript{91} From this example we can derive a principle that a good state of affairs outweighs trivial evil. So, yet another revised version of (4) could be formulated as the following:

\begin{equation}
\text{(4b) A good being eliminates every evil E that it knows about and that it can eliminate without either bringing about a greater evil or eliminating a good state of affairs that outweighs E.}
\end{equation}

Again, Plantinga asks if this reformulation is a necessary truth. He does not think so. In the following example he demonstrates why: You are on a rock climbing trip in Grand Teton and come across Curt and Bob who are stranded 125 feet apart on the face. They dropped their rope and are stranded. A violent thunderstorm approaches and you only have time to rescue one of the stranded climbers and leave before the storm arrives. If you attempted to rescue both you will be caught on the face during the storm and most likely kill everyone. In the end, you can eliminate one evil without causing more evil or eliminating a great good. In the end, just because you were not able to eliminate both evils you cannot be blamed for it.\textsuperscript{92}

So far, the examples Plantinga has used to show how certain propositions are not necessary truths all include human subjects. An argument could be made that such examples are irrelevant because God is omniscient and omnipotent, meaning that he is not limited in his power or knowledge as those in the examples. But, Plantinga’s point in his examples are only purposed to show that the additional propositions that Mackie derived are not

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{91} Plantinga, \textit{God, Freedom, and Evil}, 19.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 20.
\end{footnotes}
necessarily true, meaning that they cannot be used to argue necessarily that a set of propositions are implicitly inconsistent.

In order to further Mackie’s argument in a charitable light, Plantinga suggests the following:

(4c) An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate.

Once this proposition is added to a set we call Set A’ we have:

(1) God is omnipotent.
(2) God is wholly good.
(2’) God is omniscient.
(3) Evil exists.
(4c) An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate.
(5) There are no nonlogical limits to what an omnipotent being can do.93

In order for the atheologian94 to make a case against God’s existence, he needs to add the following conditional.

(6) If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs.

Plantinga, however, contends that (6) is not necessarily true, and the reason for this is because a given evil E might be included in some good state of affair G such that it would be impossible for G to obtain if E fails to obtain. In such a case, an omnipotent being could not eliminate evil E without eliminating good G. Plantinga thinks that this is the case. He offers the following scenario to buttress his argument: Imagine Paul is suffering an evil E that is a minor abrasion and good G is your being deliriously happy. Say that this conjunctive state of affairs

93 Ibid., 19.
94 Plantinga uses the term “atheologian” throughout his book. I take this to refer to an agnostic or atheist. I understand the “a” prefix is to be understood as being either negative i.e. atheist—one who does not believe in the existence of God, or neutral i.e. as in amoral—lacking a moral sense. In this thesis it is worth noting that Mackie was an atheist and Draper is an agnostic.
affairs, E and G, which is a state that obtains⁹⁵ if and only if both G and E obtain, is an overall good state of affairs. All else being equal, it is better to have such a state of affairs than to have neither obtain.⁹⁶ Apart from evil of some sort, in the world, certain kinds of values and familiar goods cannot exist. For example, certain moral heroism in the face of suffering and adversity inspires others to create good situations out of bad ones. So, there are cases where a good total state of affairs may include evil but the good must outweigh the evil. In other words, as Plantinga states, “It is a necessary truth that if someone bears pain magnificently, then someone is in pain.”⁹⁷ If this is true, then the proposition, (6) If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs, is not necessarily true, and as a result that Set A’ is not a contradictory set.

Thus far, according to Plantinga, the atheologian has not shown an explicit or formal contradiction that has been put forth in Set A. In order for a contradiction to be found within a set, the atheologian must find some necessary true proposition to add to set A so that a formal contradiction is derived. But no necessary proposition has been stated. The theist would argue that the only thing to do is to presume that the set is consistent until proven inconsistent, but the atheologian could argue the same in the other direction. In order to settle this, Plantinga asks, what is involved to show set A to be implicitly consistent or possible in the broadly logical sense? To show that a set S is consistent, a possible state of affairs that need not actually obtain, needs to be thought which is such that, if it were actual,

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⁹⁵ The term “obtains” refers to a state of affairs in the world that is actualized. So, if a state of affairs “obtains”, it is said to be actual in a given example, and its contradiction is said to “fail to obtain”.

⁹⁶ Plantinga, God, Freedom, and Evil, 23.

⁹⁷ Ibid.
then all of the members of $S$ would be true. How might one do this? Plantinga suggests two ways. One can try to conceive of a possible state of affairs such that, if it obtained, an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God would have a good reason for permitting evil; or one might try to specify what God’s reason is for permitting evil and try to show, if it is not obvious, that it is a good reason.

Referencing St. Augustine, Plantinga believes that a creature is more excellent which sins by free will than one that does not sin, because it does not possess free will, just as a runaway horse is better than a stone that does not run away. In other words, a universe is more perfect if it permits evil than one that does not allow for the possibility.

The challenge then to the theist is to show that there is consistency between the propositions:

(1) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.

and

(7) God creates a world containing evil and has a good reason for doing so.

It is worth reiterating at this point that Plantinga is not interested in offering a theodicy that tries to give explanation as to what God’s reason is for allowing evil, but rather, what it might be in the form of a defence, which is a weaker claim, but none the less, sufficient to argue for God’s existence.

What does Plantinga’s defence look like? Firstly, he helps us to gain a clear understanding as to what a free willed person is. Creatures that possess a free will are free with respect to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 25.}\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 26.
an action, to perform that action or to refrain from performing it. It is also important to note that no antecedent condition or causal law can determine that the action will or will not be performed. It is not to be confused with being unpredictable. The action also must be morally significant for a given person, and the person must be significantly free to perform the morally good act or the morally evil act. So, if God chooses to create free creatures, he then cannot determine them to do what is only right, because that would entail that they were not significantly free to begin with. Furthermore, he cannot create free creatures capable of committing evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so.

To review his steps so far, Plantinga argues that a world that includes free-willed creatures who sometimes do evil is more excellent or preferred than a world with no free-willed creatures, and that there are cases where sometimes a greater overall good, with the allowance of some evil, is preferred over cases where evil is eliminated, but the overall greater good is diminished or eliminated. The next challenge for Plantinga is to demonstrate that God could not have created a morally good world like the one we live in without creating one that also contains moral evil. If he is able to do so, he is then able to defend the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God, despite the existence of evil.

There are two other presumptions Plantinga has lurking in the background that are worthwhile addressing. The first is that he holds to a libertarian view of free will and not a compatibilist view of it, meaning that he rejects the idea that causal determinism and freedom both exist when it comes to freely willed actions. If compatibilism would be true, it would entail that that God could have determined free-will creatures to do only good, but if this was

100 Ibid., 29.
101 Ibid., 30.
the case, it would contradict the free will defence that understands free-willed creatures as ones free to perform a free action, that is, to have the ability to do otherwise. The second presupposition that Plantinga holds is that even though it is possible that God create a world containing free-willed creatures, it might not have been feasible. He exemplifies this by exploring a subtle point, namely, what he calls, Leibniz Lapse.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was a seventeenth century German philosopher who believed that the actual world in which we live must be the best of all possible worlds. He came to this conclusion by reasoning that before God created anything at all, he was confronted with an enormous range of choices pertaining to the world which he would actualize. Being perfectly good, he must have chosen to create the best world, and being omnipotent, he was able to create any world he pleased. J.L. Mackie agrees with Leibniz on this point, however, Mackie concludes that the present world cannot be the best of all possible worlds, therefore, there is no God. Plantinga thinks that both Mackie and Leibniz are in error. He does so because he questions the very idea of there being such a thing as a best possible world. It seems that no matter how good and blissful a world is, there is always a possible world that is a little better, perhaps with an extra person enjoying more bliss, hence, Leibniz Lapse.

If the proposition that the notion of a best possible world is, at the very least, difficult to understand or capture, we need to ask different questions about the actual world in which we live. Was it within God’s power to create any possible world he pleased? In order to tease out this question we need to understand that a possible world is a set of states of affairs that

\[\text{Ibid., 34.}\]
upholds a maximal consistent set of true propositions. It is important to note that people can exist in more than one possible world. For example in this possible world you might have had Cheerios for breakfast where in a different possible world under different circumstances you could have had Shreddies. However, only one actual world obtains which is the one in which we exist. It is also important to note that each person does not exist in all possible worlds. There are worlds in which I was never born.

Plantinga makes clear that God, strictly speaking, does not create any possible world or worlds at all. He creates the heavens and the earth but not possible states of affairs. Some states of affairs do not contain God at all and in those possible worlds the proposition “God does not exist” is true. And this is the difference between the theist and atheist. The atheist believes that the state of affairs containing God’s existence does not obtain and the theist believes that the opposite is true. If anything, God only actualizes a possible world. And so, the question then is, could God actualize any possible world He pleased? Again, Plantinga does not think the answer to this question is an easy one. In order to gain a clearer understanding, he believes that we need to start by asking questions about the nature of God. Is God a necessary being—that is, one who exists in every possible world—or a contingent being who exists in some worlds? This is a good question of clarification because the atheologian begins his argument with the non-existence of God, that is, a possible world in which God is absent. However, the question of God being contingent or necessary is irrelevant, because the argument would only pertain to the worlds in which God does exist.

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103 Refer to the method section of this thesis for a more informed description of possible worlds and the books that correspond to them.

104 Ibid., 38.
The question about God’s existence only applies to the worlds in which God could actualize if God is of that possible world.\textsuperscript{105}

Now that our focus is solely on the possible worlds in which God does exist and actualizes, Plantinga asks what worlds God could actualize with past, future and present scenarios of free-willed creatures. His first example has you and Paul returning from an Australian hunting expedition. Paul captured an aardvark, mistaking it for a cassowary. He is deeply attached to it. When you both return to the U.S. you offer Paul $500 for the aardvark, but your offer is turned down. Later you ask yourself what Paul would have done if you offered him $700. What is being asked is what would have happened under a specific set of conditions. So, say a set of conditions S’ includes the state of affairs that you offered Paul $700 for the aardvark. At this point we do not know if Paul would accept the offer or reject it. Paul is free to do either. So set S’ contains at this point the following two conditional statements:

(8) If the state of affairs S’ had obtained, Paul would accept the offer of $700.

and

(9) If the state of affairs S’ had obtained, Paul would reject the offer.

Either (8) or (9) is true, but not both. This means that either

(10) Paul accepts the offer.

or

(11) Paul rejects the offer.

is true. In other words, in some possible worlds Paul accepts is true and other possible worlds he rejects is true.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 40.
The real question then is this: Which proposition, either (8) or (9) is in fact true? The answer to this question will tell us which possible world is beyond the power of God to create. Suppose (8), that Paul accepts the offer of $700, is in fact true. Then, in spite of God’s omnipotence, if God actualizes set S’ he is not able to make (9) obtain because Paul is free with respect to his action to choose whether or not to take the offer. So, based on Paul’s decision, (10) will be true and (11) false. In other words, the worlds that God can actualize are partly up to Paul.106

The above scenario involved a past tense example about what world God could or could not actualize. Next, Plantinga has us consider a future tense example. At some time t, Maurice will be free to an insignificant action, that being, having freeze dried oatmeal for breakfast. At time t, he will be free to have oatmeal, but also free to take Shreddies. Consider S’, a state of affairs that is included in the actual world and includes Maurice’s being free at time t to take oatmeal or reject it. S’ does not include Maurice’s taking it or rejecting it. Leading up to this decision there are conditions relevant to Maurice’s decision, such as the fact that he hasn’t had oatmeal lately, and S’ includes these conditions. Now, God knows what Maurice will do at time t if S’ obtains or becomes actual. That is, God knows either

(12) If S’ were to obtain, Maurice will freely take the oatmeal.

or

(13) If S’ were to obtain, Maurice will freely reject it.

We might not know whether (12) is true or (13) is true and even Maurice himself might not know. Suppose (12) is true. Then, there are possible worlds that God, even though he is

106 Ibid.
omnipotent, cannot create, because Maurice in part gets to choose which free action he will pursue. So the actual world, which Plantinga calls *Kronos* for ease of reference sake, will have Maurice in the future having oatmeal, and the possible world of Maurice having Shreddies, although possible, will not be able to obtain or become actual.\(^\text{107}\)

Now that past and future examples of what God would or would not be able to actualize have been examined, Plantinga has us ask once again, could God have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil? His free will defender claim is:

> (14) God is omnipotent, and it was not within His power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

On the face of it, (14) seems false because there are possible worlds that contain moral good but no moral evil. Even if Leibniz’s claim that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds is false, it does not follow that (14) is possible. In order to demonstrate that it was not in God’s power to create a world containing moral good, but no moral evil, Plantinga offers the following bribe case to illuminate his point.

Curley Smith, the mayor of Boston, is opposed to the proposed freeway route. It would require destruction of the Old North Church along with some other antiquated and structurally unsound buildings. L.B. Smedes the director of highways asks him whether he would drop his opposition for one million. “Of course” he replies. “Would you do it for two million?” asks Smedes. “What do you take me for?” comes the indignant reply. “That’s already established,” smirks Smedes; “all that remains is to nail down your price.” Smedes then offers him a bribe of $35000. Unwilling to break with old traditions of Bay State

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 43.
politics, Curley accepts. Smedes then spends a sleepless night wondering whether he could have bought Curley for $20000. 108

Plantinga now applies the same logic as in the past and future cases of free will and God actualizing a possible world. Suppose Curley was free with respect to the action of taking the bribe and that he would have taken it.

(15) If Smedes had offered Curley a bribe of $20000 he would have accepted it.

If (15) is true, then there is a state of affairs S’ that includes Curley’s being offered a bribe of $20000 and the possibility of Curley accepting the bribe or rejecting it. And, to make sure all that is relevant to this scenario is included, think of this scenario as part of a maximal world segment, meaning that (15) is included in a set S’ and is compatible with but not included in it, and the result will be an entire possible world. In other words, if S’ is a maximal world segment, then every possible state of affairs that includes S’, but is not included by S’, is a possible world. So, this means that

(16) If S’ were actual, Curley would have accepted the bribe.

is true. It also means that even though there is a possible world where Curley does not take the bribe, God could not actualize it, because to do so he would have to override Curley’s free action of taking it. At large, there are possible worlds where Curley never does anything morally wrong, but God is unable to actualize any of them, because of Curley’s free will where he chooses to take the bribe. 109 Proposition (14) now seems a bit more plausible. If we expand the case with Curley and have it include more people, we can see how God, given

108 Ibid., 45-46.
109 Ibid., 46-47.
free will creatures, is not able to actualize a world where no wrong is committed, and

Plantinga calls this problem, *transworld depravity*\(^{110}\). His definition is as follows:

\[
(17) \text{A person } P \text{ suffers from transworld depravity if and only if the following holds: } \\
\text{For every world } W \text{ such that } P \text{ is significantly free in } W \text{ and } P \text{ does only what is } \\
\text{right in } W, \text{ there is an action } A \text{ and a maximal world segment } S' \text{ such that } \\
(i) S' \text{ includes } A's \text{ being morally significant for } P. \\
(ii) S' \text{ includes } P's \text{ being free with respect to } A. \\
(iii) S' \text{ is included in } W \text{ and includes neither } P's \text{ performing } A \text{ nor } P's \text{ refraining from performing } A. \\
(iv) \text{If } S' \text{ were actual, } P \text{ would go wrong with respect to } A.^{111}
\]

The idea of transworld depravity, if true, makes proposition (14), that God is omnipotent, and it was not within His power to create a world containing moral good, but no moral evil, much more plausible. If free-willed creatures suffer from transworld depravity then, no matter God’s omnipotence, he could not actualize Kronos (the actual world) where there contains moral good but no moral evil. However, the point may still be debated. Even if Kronos contains people suffering from transworld depravity, it still does not follow that God could not have created a world full of different people. What if person X, who does not exist in Kronos, exists in a different possible world? Could God actualize that possible world instead? To answer this question, the idea of *essence* is brought into consideration.

Plantinga asks us to consider Socrates. Socrates exists in different possible worlds. Some of his properties in these different worlds are the same as the one he has in Kronos, but some of his properties are the same throughout all the possible worlds in which he exists. Some of

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the properties he has in all possible worlds are essential properties of his but are trivial, properties such as, “being 6 ft. tall or not 6 ft. tall,” and “being self-identical”. But there are other more interesting kinds of essential properties of his that Plantinga explains as follows:

Socrates has the property of being snub nosed. This property, presumably, is not essential to him; he could have had some other kind of nose. So there are possible worlds in which he is not snub nosed. Let W’ be any such world. If W’ would have been actual, Socrates would not have been snubnosed; that is to say, Socrates has the property being nonsnubnosed in W’. For to say that an object X has a property of this sort—the property of having P in W, where P is a property and W is a possible world—is to say simply that X would have had P if W had been actual. Properties of this sort are *world-indexed* properties. Socrates has the world-indexed property being nonsnubnosed in W’. He has this property *being snubnosed in Kronos*. For suppose W’ had been actual: Then, while Socrates would not have been snubnosed, it would have been true that if Kronos had been actual, Socrates would have been snubnosed. It is evident, I take it, that if indeed Socrates is snubnosed in Kronos, the actual world, then it is true in every world that Socrates is *snubnosed in Kronos* in every world in which he exists. This property, therefore, is essential to him; there is no world in which he exists and lacks it.\(^{112}\)

So, world indexicals help us to keep track of a person’s essence or essential properties throughout different possible worlds. Plantinga believes people have many world indexed properties, and every world indexed property could be stated as person X having property P in world W. E.g. *Socrates* has the property of *being snubnosed* in world *Kronos*, however, in say, world W’, *Socrates* does not have the property of *being snubnosed* if it was actualized. Each world indexed property P of a given person X is such that either X has P essentially, or its complement not-P essentially.\(^{113}\)

Next, Plantinga has us define Socrates’ essence as the set of properties essential to him, which includes all of his world indexed properties. Furthermore, these essential properties are uniquely Socrates’ and no other. And to make Plantinga’s point even stronger, he goes

\(^{112}\) Ibid., 50.

\(^{113}\) Ibid., 51.
on to say that there could not be any other such person. So, all in all, Socrates’ essence contains a complete set of world indexed properties.\textsuperscript{114} Now with a world indexed definition of essential properties, Plantinga returns to the example of the Boston Mayor, Curly Smith. Curley Smith suffering from transworld depravity is part of Curley’s essence. The possible worlds that contain Curley never doing what is wrong using his free will is part of Curley’s essence. But in those possible worlds where Curley never does what is wrong, Curley still has the property of doing what is wrong in Kronos, namely, taking a bribe. And so, even in the worlds where Curley exemplifies moral perfection in that particular world, he still has the essential property of doing wrong in some worlds in which he exists, because he suffers from transworld depravity. So even though God could create a world where Curley does no wrong in a given possible world, God still cannot create a world where Curley is significantly free but always does what is right in every possible world, because of his true essence. Plantinga states it as follows:

There is an action A and a maximal world segment S’ such that

(i) S’ includes A’s being morally significant for Curley.

(ii) S’ includes Curley’s being free with respect to A.

(iii) S’ is included in W’ but includes neither Curley’s performing A nor his refraining from A.

and

(iv) If S’ had been actual, Curley would have gone wrong with respect to A.

So, if Curley, for simplicity sake, is understood as a bundle of essential properties rather than a person, we can see that God could not create a maximal world segment where Curley never goes wrong with respect to action A, because God could never actualize it. Even though

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
Curley could have been created in a world where he did not become the mayor of Boston, or be in the position to take a bribe, he still has as part of his essential properties, doing wrong in a world in which he is able to perform such an action and does so. In the end, God cannot create Curley significantly free in a world W who essentially does what is right all the time. Put formally, Plantinga states:

18) An essence E suffers from Transworld depravity if and only if for every world W such that E contains the properties is significantly free in W and always does what is right in W, there is an action A and a maximal world segment S’ such that

(i) S’ includes E’s being instantiated and E’s instantiation’s being free with respect to A and A’s being morally significant for E’s instantiation.

(ii) S’ is included in W but includes neither E’s instantiation’s performing A nor E’s instantiation’s refraining from A.

and

(iii) If S’ were actual, then the instantiation of E would have gone wrong with respect to A.\textsuperscript{115}

In a world containing a free-willed creature like Curley, who suffers from transworld depravity, it is clear that it is not within God’s power to create a world where Curley is morally perfect. To take this point even further, Plantinga states that it is entirely possible that all people suffer from transworld depravity. He argues that the world in which we live resembles such a state of affairs. In the end, God cannot be blamed for actualizing a world containing moral evil, as long as the world he actualizes is good and does not contain an overwhelming amount of evil. The question then is, “Does the actual world in which we live contain an amount of evil that outweighs good?” To answer it, we will now turn to the evidential argument of evil against the existence of God.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 52-53.
The Evidential Challenge

**Pain and Pleasure (the biological role of good and evil)**

In *Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists* \(^{116}\), Paul Draper argues that the evidence of observable evil in the world ought to move a rational person to believe that God does not exist or at the very least is indifferent to the suffering experienced by sentient beings. Draper’s agnostic stance is not meant to show any logical inconsistency with respect to belief in God and the existence of evil, as Mackie tried to prove, but rather to persuade his readers that even if there is no logical inconsistency between the two, a person is more rational to reject belief in God by examining the case against God, using Bayesian probability calculus.

Draper begins by defining “God” technically as an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect person who created the universe, and “theism” as the term used to describe the existence of such a god. With a god possessing these qualities, he finds a mere logical defense for the existence of such a being unacceptable. There are many different possible worlds that can coherently account for the existence of God, but the real question he seeks to answer is, “if God exists, then why is there so much evil in the world?” \(^{117}\) On this question, he believes, the theist falls short. Draper’s strategy to prove that the theist’s account is found wanting is through what he calls the *Hypothesis of Indifference* (HI).

HI: Neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human persons. \(^{118}\)

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\(^{117}\) Rowe, *God and the Problem of Evil*, 181.

\(^{118}\) Ibid.
Draper adds additional details to this hypothesis. Mainly, that HI does not entail the existence of a supernatural being, making it consistent with naturalism. In order to set the stage for his argument, he gives us the following definitions. Statements reporting both the observations one has made of humans and animals experiencing pain or pleasure, and encountered testimony concerning such observation, are symbolized by the letter $O$. Pain is the mental and physical suffering of a sentient being. The symbol $C$ stands for the claim that Draper seeks to defend. The formulation of his claim is that HI explains the facts $O$ reports much better than theism does.

C: Independent of the observations and testimony $O$ reports, $O$ is much more probable on the assumption that HI is true than on the assumption that theism is true.

What this looks like, when formulated in symbolic form is the following. $P(x/y)$ is the probability of statement $x$, independent of the observations and testimony $O$ reports, granted that statement $y$ is true.

C: $P(O/\text{HI})$ is much greater than $P(O/\text{theism})$.

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119 Simply put, naturalism is the philosophical viewpoint according to which everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted. Because there are varieties of naturalism, (see David Papineau, "Naturalism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/naturalism/>.) for the purposes of this paper we shall use the above definition as it closely resembles the definition given by Plantinga in his book Alvin Plantinga, Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011), pg. xi-x. “I take naturalism to be the thought that there is no such person as God, or anything like God. Naturalism is stronger than atheism: you can be an atheist without rising to the heights (sinking to the lowest depths?) of naturalism; but you can’t be a naturalist without being an atheist. Naturalism is what we could call a worldview, a sort of total way of looking at ourselves and our world.”

120 Rowe, God and the Problem of Evil, 182.

121 Ibid.
Of course these are epistemic probabilities, as defined in the method part of this thesis, and not statistical probabilities. The reason for this is because the observations vary with respect to people, time, and situations. Draper helps us understand this point using a poker game analogy. The epistemic probability that one hand will include four aces differs for players who have in their hand no aces and those who have one or more.\textsuperscript{122} If Draper is successful in showing that the claim that HI is more probable than belief in theism, based on epistemic probability, then belief in God will be epistemically irrational because it is irrational to believe in something that is \textit{prima facie}\textsuperscript{123} less probable and reject a more probable claim.

\textit{The Biological Utility of Pain and Pleasure}

On Draper’s account, O in the formula P(O/HI) is the observations and testimony about pleasure and pain. Biologically, both pleasure and pain play a goal in goal-directed organic systems. Pleasure and pain fall into the concept of what Draper calls “biological usefulness”. Biological usefulness is goal directed,

…just in case for some property G that S has exhibited or will exhibit, a broad range of potential environmental changes are such that:

(i) If they occurred at a time when S is exhibiting G and no compensating changes took place in the parts of S, then S would cease to exhibit G and never exhibit G again, and

(ii) If they occurred at a time when S is exhibiting G, then compensating changes would take place in the parts of S, resulting in either S’s continuing to exhibit G or in S’s exhibiting G once again.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 183.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Prima facie} meaning, on first appearance, that is, if something is \textit{prima facie} true, it ought to be believed unless otherwise undercut or defeated by a competing argument.

\textsuperscript{124} Rowe, \textit{God and the Problem of Evil}, 183.
Draper is quick to note that goal orientation does not entail an intelligent being like God, but only interdependent organisms, parts of organisms, or ecosystems. He goes on to say that biological goals are considered such, if they are biologically useful, that is if they,

(i) Causally contribute to one of S’s biological goals (or to one of the biological goals of some other goal-directed organic system of which it is a part), and

(ii) Its doing so is not biologically accidental. ...(for example, a non-fatal heart attack that prevents a person from committing suicide…)

He also acknowledges that some pain and pleasure in the world has no biological usefulness, such as masochistic pleasure and pain, which he categorizes as biologically gratuitous. Since pain and pleasure are experienced by an array of sentient beings, further categorization is required in order to yield a more accurate rendering of the probability of God’s existence, granted the existence of evil. Draper does so accordingly: O1 is representative of the observations of moral agents (i.e. humans) experiencing pain or pleasure that we know to be biologically useful. O2 is representative of the observations of sentient beings that are not moral agents (i.e. non human animals) experiencing pain or pleasure that we know to be biologically useful. O3 is representative of observations of sentient beings (i.e. both humans and non human animals) experiencing pain or pleasure, that we do not know to be biologically useful.

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125 Ibid.

126 Non human animals are said to be non moral agents because of their inability to produce sufficient evidence of their ability to have abstract thoughts and thus non accountable. In other words, humans as rational animals have the ability to use their abstract reasoning to weigh better and worse actions geared toward life when choices are presented. They can have thoughts about their thoughts. There seems to be lacking evidence for this in non human animals. For more discussion on this topic see Lori Gruen, "The Moral Status of Animals", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/moral-animal/>. Also included in this group of non moral creatures is young human children.
To simplify, O is the conjunction of O1, O2, and O3, and so the probability or any hypothesis, be it theism or HI is calculated as follows: Probability P (all observations O/hypothesis h) = Probability P((O1 and O2 and O3)/hypothesis h). In order to accurately calculate what the probability of the likelihood of a hypothesis with three variables to be more likely than another, the following formula is applied:

\[ P(O1 & O2 & O3/h) = P(O1/h) \times P(O2/h & O1) \times P(O3/h & O1 & O2) \]

Draper believes that when truth values are plugged into the variables, claim A, that is,

A: \[ P(O1/\text{HI}) \times P(O2/\text{HI} & O1) \times P(O3/\text{HI} & O1 & O2) \]

is more probable than claim B,

B: \[ P(O1/\text{theism}) \times P(O2/\text{theism} & O1) \times P(O3/\text{theism} & O1 & O2) \]

In order to prove A is greater than B, Draper evaluates as follows. Firstly, he posits that humans are goal directed organic systems that are driven by biological goals. Pain and pleasure contribute to reaching these goals. Pain is said to be morally intrinsically bad and pleasure, good. The question is: Does the difference between the bad and the good, that is, the pain and pleasure, contribute to the biological goals of humans? If so, Draper is willing to concede that theism is true, but if not, HI is. The reason for this is because God, he says, is responsible for the existence of pain and pleasure in the world, and since he is omnibenevolent, he should morally produce pleasure in his creatures, even if it is not biologically useful, and should not allow biological pain that does not serve a moral or biological purpose. So, to recap, the pleasure and pain observed in moral creatures (i.e.

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127 Rowe, *God and the Problem of Evil*, 184.
128 Ibid., 185.
129 Ibid., 186.
humans) when placed in a balance should tilt toward pleasure over pain, if theism is true, and if otherwise, HI. Draper believes that the balance tilts toward HI. He goes on to defuse an objection pertaining to the complexity of an organism. It may be said that more complex systems have more intrinsic goodness, because of their complexity and therefore warrant more pain, but, Draper retorts, if God exists he could make simpler organic systems that require less pain to accomplish its goals.\textsuperscript{130}

Next, Draper examines O2, that is, observations reported and testified about non moral agents that experience pain and pleasure that is biologically useful. Since the pain experienced might be useful for moral ends, such pain might be reasonably expected, but on O2 the same cannot be argued, because the nature of the sentient creatures that lack moral forming ends due to their lack the cognitive moral awareness. This leads Draper to conclude that O2 is greater on HI than on theism.\textsuperscript{131}

O3 is the observations about sentient beings experiencing pain or pleasure that we do not know to be biologically useful. Here, Draper addresses two arguments that he believes favours HI over theism. The first is that under theism, sentient beings should be expected to be happier than not, but rather than see this in actuality, he argues that many humans and animals experience prolonged and intense suffering, greater than the number that are happy. Unfortunately, the moral goods that ought to come from this are not found. The second argument posed by Draper is that pain and pleasure, with the exception of gratuitous pain and pleasure, is largely the result of goal achieving of biological systems. The gratuitous pain

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 187.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
and pleasure, he says, is epiphenomenal. In order to solidify this argument he introduces new terminology, “pathological” pain or pleasure and “biologically appropriate” pain or pleasure. Pathological pain or pleasure is that which results from the failure of a biological system to function properly (E.g., cancer). Biologically appropriate pain or pleasure is useful pain or pleasure, such as feeling pain when coming in contact with fire. Fire harms human flesh and so the pain is appropriate to move humans to react in order to survive, even if the fire ends up killing the person. Obviously, pathological and biologically appropriate pleasure and pain have use for the theist that is known, but what about the non-pathological and biologically inappropriate pleasure and pain? Because in the world there are much of these two pains and pleasures that are not morally accounted for, it seems more likely that HI is more probable.

To give treatment to the subject, Draper briefly tackles the unlikelihood of common theodicies offered by theists. By analyzing theodicies, Draper aims to show that each failed theodicy lowers the probability that God exists. In total he analyzes four which are as follows.

**Evaluating Theodicies**

The goal of a theodicy is to justify God for permitting certain evils so that a greater moral good could be accomplished. In order to properly evaluate a theodicy, one must append the

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132 Ibid., 188. An epiphenomenon is a secondary phenomenon that occurs aside a primary phenomenon without causing the primary phenomenon. One way to think about this is to use the metaphor of fire and smoke. Where you see smoke you can assume fire, but the smoke is not a cause of the fire. In philosophy of mind, epiphenomenalists hold that consciousness arises from physical brain events, but consciousness, like smoke does not cause the brain to react. Draper argues that biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure are accidental epiphenomena that can be contributed to nature’s indifference.

133 Ibid.
probability of theism on its own to the likelihood of a given theodicy to be true. Draper labels statements that expand the initial claim, $h^*$. So, when formulated, a theodicy on $P(O/\text{theism})$ is the expansion of theodicy $T_n$ of theism.

$$P(O/\text{theism}) = (P(T_n/\text{theism}) \times P(O/T_n)) + (P(\neg T_n/\text{theism}) \times P(\text{theism} \& \neg T_n)).$$

To simplify, what this formulation is conveying is that the probability of theism is equal to the probability of a given theodicy on theism, multiplied by the probability of our observation of that theodicy being true, added to the probability of the theodicy being false on theism times the probability of our observations of the truth of theism, and not the theodicy. An important thing to keep in mind is that when evaluating the probability of a hypothesis, one needs to weigh the claim against the probability that the hypothesis is not true. That way, a more accurate calculation can be had.

Draper examines three theodicies and in the end, employs a “Weighted Average Principle” (WAP) to the above formula. The first theodicy under examination attempts to capture the freedom given to humans in order to advance morality. Draper labels this freedom as freedom* and defines a free* action

only if (i) it is free in an incompatibilist sense – that is, in a sense incompatible with its being determined by antecedent conditions outside the agent’s control- and (ii) if it is morally right, then at least one alternative action that is open in an incompatibilist sense to the agent is such that it would be morally wrong for the agent to perform that alternative action.$^{135}$

Creatures with freedom* have much value because freely chosen moral living is of value.

Freedom* once given, must allow for the agent to freely perform right actions. On the contrary, however, it can also be used to perform wrong actions. Some wrong actions, says

134 Ibid., 190.

135 Ibid.
Draper, do not entail pain, such as breaking promises, depriving someone of pleasure, etc…\textsuperscript{136} God’s objective for pain should be to influence people to do morally right actions and because of his omniscience, he could influence events so that a favorable balance of freely performed right actions outweigh wrong ones. In effect, the first theodicy is stated as such:

\begin{equation}
T_1: \text{God exists, and one of His final ends is a favorable balance of freely performed right actions over wrong actions.}\textsuperscript{137}
\end{equation}

Draper believes that this proposition is not likely to be in favour of theism because according to him, even the concept of human freedom\textsuperscript{*} as great value to a possible world, is doubtful. But for argument’s sake, even if granted that it is probable on theism, still, the probability of observations in the world over $T_1$ being true would not be significantly more likely than if theism were false. Draper thinks that if God uses pain to advance morality then here should exist pain that helps with this advancement, but also that pain is necessary for certain moral actions to be enacted. Both of these are observable, however, based on our observations, pain causes people to perform morally wrong actions and some pains are even necessary for certain wrong actions to materialize. This line of reasoning is similar to Mackie’s argument that even though some moral failures can bring about greater good, so too can moral failures bring about greater cruelty. So, because the balance of good over evil within this theodicy is not clearly in favour of theism, the theodicy as a whole is unimpressive.

The next theodicy Draper examines is the argument that free will beings produce and fail to prevent suffering. So, the determination of humans learning greater moral responsibility for

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid.}, 191.

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid.}, 192.
their own well-being is based on the how well they decide to act. This could be formulated as such:

\[ T_2: \text{God exists, and one of His final ends is for humans to have the freedom* to make very important moral decisions.} \]^{138}

Draper argues that even if he grants that \( T_2 \) is more probable on a theistic account, if conjoined to the probability of our observations, over theism, it still would be probabilistically low, or at least not significantly greater. The reason for this is because of our observations of humans that experience pain for which they are not morally responsible. He calls this “amoral pain.”^{139} Some theists, he claims, argue that amoral pain is to be expected because the pain shows humans why God gives freedom, and that amoral pain is necessary for humans to actually be free. Draper believes that the first of these two arguments is question begging because it presumes that God is the one giving moral freedom, which would make the claim of God’s existence presupposed rather than a conclusion at which to be arrived. The second of these two claims is also unsatisfactory for him because it presupposes that the first human being that brought about evil, who never observed it before, would need it to know why moral goodness exists. In the end, neither argument seems to strengthen preventative measures against the proliferation of evil. Moreover, it does not account for amoral pain adequately, and it can be argued that God could have given humans knowledge about suffering without finding out about it the hard way. So \( T_2 \) in conjunction with the probability of our observations over theism being true is still relatively low.

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\[^{138} \text{Ibid., 193.} \]

\[^{139} \text{Ibid.} \]
Another argument raised by Draper in favour of HI has us considering the question of God allowing humans the responsibility to harm ourselves the way we do. If God is a good parent, would not a good parent limit the amount of harm we could bring upon ourselves, at least until we were responsible enough to take on more responsibility? If God truly was a good parent God would only give worthy children great responsibility.

The last theodicy that Draper examines is the claim that since God’s knowledge is limitless and human knowledge, finite, we should not expect to be able to know why certain evils exist. That is:

T₃: God exists and has a vast amount of knowledge about good and evil and how they are related that humans do not have.

In Draper’s view, T₃ is a weak argument because if true, it still does not seem to affect the overall argument of God’s existence based on our overall observations of evil in the world. If God exists, he may have moral reasons unknown to us for not preventing evils, but he also may have moral reasons unknown to us to prevent evil, for all we know. If the knife cuts both ways, the theodicy is weakened. Moreover, a similar argument can be made for or against God, involving goodness that God knows about that we do not. In the end, what we do not know is not helpful to us determining whether theism is more probable than not.

When considering all three theodicies, Draper concludes that the probability of theism based on our observations of evil in the world do not increase at all. But, aside from these theodicies, some theists still contend that an abductive argument for God’s existence, which include the cosmological argument, teleological argument, and argument from

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¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 195.
¹⁴¹ Ibid., 196.
consciousness, can be given, making theism more probable. Draper responds to this with what he calls the Indifferent Deity Hypothesis. This hypothesis is defined as such:

There exists an omnipotent and omniscient person who created the Universe and who has no intrinsic concern about the pain or pleasure of other beings.¹⁴²

His point is that even if a God is said to exist ontologically, there is no reason to believe that he is concerned about good and evil as it pertains to us.

**On Being Evidentially Challenged**

In “On Being Evidentially Challenged,”¹⁴³ Alvin Plantinga gives an analysis of what it means for evidence to pose a challenge to a belief held by a given person. According to Paul Draper, theistic evidence comes up short when calculating the probability of God’s existence against observations of the world. As a result, he believes rational individuals should adopt his Hypothesis of Indifference. Is Draper’s rendering of HI’s probability as high as he would like to assume, though? Plantinga does not think so.

When determining the epistemic probability of a propositional belief K relative to a person S, other propositions and experiences specific to S’s epistemic environment must be considered.¹⁴⁴ The epistemic environment is an assumed context that allows one to place different hypotheses against one another, and according to Draper, a contending hypothesis in question must at least be as plausible as other live options that are available. How, then, does one’s view become evidentially challenged? Simply put, a proposition “P is

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¹⁴² Ibid., 198.


¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 177.
evidentially challenged for a person \( S \) if and only if \( S \) believes \( P \) and there are propositions \( Q \) and \( R \) such that \( S \) believes \( Q \), \( R \) is incompatible with \( P \), and \( Q \) is much more probable with respect to \( R \) than with respect to \( P \).^{145} To show that more is needed for a belief to be a serious threat to a hypothesis, Plantinga offers an example.^{146} Consider the following three propositions:

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\begin{align*}
(1) & \quad \text{George is a non-Catholic.} \\
(2) & \quad \text{George is a professor at Notre Dame.} \\
(3) & \quad \text{George is a Catholic academic.}^{147}
\end{align*}
\]

Suppose, (1) and (2) for Plantinga is highly probable, and he believes all three propositions, but (3) is evidentially incompatible with (1). An evidential challenge emerges, but does it mean that one of the propositions is false and should be rejected? Whatever the case, more informational clarity is required. Plantinga’s point is that if we think in such ridged terms, when it comes to beliefs weighed by epistemic probability, we would need to deem all of our beliefs evidentially challenged. The problem is that more contextual considerations are required. Plantinga offers the following to help us see what he means.

[L]et \( P \) be the proposition that I am now typing at my computer and let \( Q \) be the proposition that the lilacs are blooming in my backyard. \( Q \) is improbable on \( P \) (sadly enough, most of the time when I am typing on my computer, the lilacs aren’t blooming): as \( R \), choose the proposition I and some dinner guests are in the backyard (out of reach of my computer) admiring the lilacs. Clearly \( Q \) is much more likely with respect to \( R \) than with respect to \( P \) (I hardly ever admire the lilacs with dinner guests while typing at my computer). The proposition that I am now typing on my

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^{145} Ibid., 178

^{146} An interesting fact about Plantinga is that he spent most of his career teaching at Notre Dame University, which is a Roman Catholic institute. However, Plantinga himself is a Protestant Christian.

^{147} Ibid., 178.
computer is therefore evidentially challenged; does this give me much of a prima facie reason to reject it? \footnote{148}

When examining probability of the likelihood of a given event, we cannot simply point to propositions that buttress an argument without considering other propositions and experiences that give justification for its contrary. In the case with Plantinga sitting at a computer, surely it is more likely for him not to be sitting typing because blooming lilacs and backyard dinner parties are a more likely occurrence, but that does not mean he is not typing on his computer. At the time he experienced the typing out of his article, he was at his computer, regardless of the state of his lilacs.

A second example is given by Plantinga.

\textbf{[L]et }P\textbf{ be the proposition that London, England, is larger than London, Ontario, and let }Q\textbf{ be the proposition that yesterday afternoon I was in the north half of the woods behind my house. I believe both of these propositions. }Q\textbf{ is unlikely on }P\textbf{; I am seldom in those woods (though if I am I am likely to be in the north half). And let }R\textbf{ be the proposition that yesterday afternoon I went for a walk in the woods behind my house in order to try to recover from the shock of learning that as a matter of fact London, England, is smaller than London, Ontario. }P\textbf{ is evidentially challenged, but the challenge doesn’t give me much of a reason to doubt it.} \footnote{149}

Again, Plantinga emphasises that for evidence to count against the likelihood of a proposition being true to a particular person, it needs contextual considerations that are specific to the other beliefs of that person. It cannot simply be evidence that is remote to the person’s experience and web of beliefs. \footnote{150} One cannot take a false belief (E.g., London, England is bigger than London, Ontario) and levy it against the likelihood of a belief that is experientially real and propositionally true (E.g., Plantinga being in the woods the other day).

\footnote{148} Ibid., 178-9.\footnote{149} Ibid., 179.\footnote{150} A web of beliefs is an idea originating from W.V.O. Quine. All the beliefs we hold are connected to other beliefs even if they are not all true. We strive to have coherence among the beliefs. At the core of our beliefs are those that are strongest and hardest to give up, whereas the beliefs found on the periphery are more likely to be given up.
The point is that any held belief that is true can be evidentially challenged, when the evidence levied against it does not properly consider the relations it has to a given person’s web of beliefs, that is, as long as the propositional belief in question is not logically impossible.

What we should conclude from this is that some evidential challenges are not significant if tested in this way. In the case of our observation \((O)\) of pain and pleasure in the world, Plantinga states that when it is faced with the challenge of the belief that “yesterday afternoon, while walking in the woods behind my house, I suddenly realized that \(O\) is false,”\(^{151}\) an incompatibility arises. If a belief is to truly be an evidential challenge, more is needed.

The real questions are, what constitutes a significant evidential challenge? What causes real doubt?

In order to answer these questions, Plantinga turns to science. Within the discipline of science, different scientific hypotheses compete through the means of explanatory power. One hypothesis gives an explanation for the behaviour of different gases, while another hypothesis—incompatible with the first—makes a different claim based on certain data. The probability of the second hypothesis being true increases, and on the face of it, brings legitimate reason to doubt the first. Worth noting here is that every scientific hypothesis still can face evidential challenges, but that does not mean that the challenges are significant. If proper contextual considerations are not engaged with regard to what counts as demarcating features of a successful scientific system or paradigm, they could easily be challenged by

\(^{151}\) Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, 179.
beliefs that are irrelevant to the systems themselves, such as walking in the northern half of the woods yesterday. Based on Newtonian mechanics predictability, it is unlikely that the walk took place yesterday. Perhaps more likely is the belief that Plantinga took the walk yesterday because he was recovering from being shocked about learning that Newtonian mechanics is not nearly correct for everyday objects and velocities. But just because the latter belief is more likely, it does not follow that he should doubt that Newtonian mechanics is true or is nearly correct for everyday objects. In order to understand more clearly what is going on here, Plantinga gives us a revised version of what it means for a belief to serve as an evidential challenge.

[A] hypothesis P is evidentially challenged for S, [when] the other proposition Q that S believes is the datum and the proposition R incompatible with P with respect to which Q is much more likely than it is with respect to P is the alternative hypothesis.\textsuperscript{152}

Walking in the northern part of the woods yesterday does not serve as significant evidence against Newtonian physics, because Newtonian physics is not obliged to predict such a fact. In other words, it is not relevant. The evidential challenge must offer data relevant to the theory. In addition to this, for the data to pose an effective challenge, the alternative hypothesis must also be relevant. In the case of the belief about walking in the woods, a relevant hypothesis is not the denial of Newtonian physics. What, then, should count as relevance? Plantinga proposes that “[A] proposition P is \textit{relevantly challenged} when it faces an epistemic challenge in which Q is a relevant datum and R a relevant alternative hypothesis.”\textsuperscript{153} In short, scientific hypotheses are challenged by other scientific hypotheses.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 180.
hypotheses, because they compete for epistemic probability based on relevant data. The challenge must be based on relevant evidence, and this is what is significant.

How, then, can we apply this to the hypothesis of indifference and theism? Plantinga argues that HI and theism are not like competing scientific hypotheses. That is, they are not in the same business to explain the body of data. Moreover, Plantinga argues that scientific hypotheses are not the only ones to pose a serious relevant evidential challenge. He does think that scientific knowledge is part of a larger whole, but not specifically an explanation of anything in particular. That is, it does not explain a particular collection of data. The broader question in all this is: Do only scientific hypotheses provide serious relevant evidential challenges? Again, Plantinga does not think this is the case and explains why through an example.

Suppose a friend, Paul, has been vacationing on Cape Cod. You receive a postcard from him, mailed from Grand Teton National Park. In the postcard, Paul states that his days are dry and that the temperatures drop. Under such a description, one might think that Paul is not in Cape Cod but rather in Grand Teton. In spite of your memory of Paul telling you he was in Cape Cod, your belief that he is really in Grand Teton poses a serious evidential challenge. Plantinga’s point is that the challenge did obtain warrant from your memory/belief of Paul telling you that he was going to be in Cape Cod. Your memory is fine; it was a different sort of evidence, evidence found on the postcard, that warranted your new belief, because it gave a better explanation using relevant data. Serious evidential

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154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
challenges, therefore, have warrant only if they explain the same body of data. From this example, the question arising is, does our observations, O, on HI constitute a relevant challenge to theism? Plantinga does not think so because HI is simply the belief that theism is false and that the state of sentient beings is not due to good or bad actions from any other human person. In other words, the denial of a hypothesis is not a hypothesis in of itself. So, if HI is a real threat to theism, Plantinga believes it must answer the following.

1. Is O, in fact, much more probable with respect to HI than theism?
2. Are there other data much more probable with respect to theism than with respect to HI?
3. Does theism have much by way of warrant that doesn’t arise from its nicely explaining a body of data?\textsuperscript{156}

To answer the first question, Plantinga examines the claim that observations O, favours HI over theism. This claim, however, must be noted, that it is a probability claim \textit{for a person}, not simpliciter, meaning without qualification. It is a question pertaining to a given epistemic situation. The epistemic situation for a theist or group of theists is different than for non-theists. The different groups have different epistemic situations.

In response to the second question, the observation of the data reported by moral agents is difficult to estimate, probabilistically independent of the observations and testimony O reports, because it strips a person from his or her epistemic situation, granted that different people have different epistemic situations. If everyone was in the same epistemic situation, then it would be easier to compare and assess degrees of likeness.

The third question is then answered negatively. Theists believe that HI is false and cannot easily be added to a theist’s set of beliefs in order to yield an estimate based on the new

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 181.
contradictory epistemic situation. Theism and HI are not maximally similar in many respects. Many of the beliefs theists hold that are not held by those subscribing to HI will tip the balance in favour of theism, even though some biological beliefs about pleasure and pain overlap. Plantinga contends that HI might seem plausible only because people do not know enough about what to expect God to do, in situations of pleasure and pain. In other words, we do not know what the best alternatives are for God to choose from. It might be the case that biological survival and reproduction are not the only goals God would want to achieve with respect to moral agents. Moreover, he believes that some moral agents on a theist account, mainly angels and devils, exist as sentient beings but do not have biological bodies. For these creatures, biological pain or pleasure is a non-issue. But rather than focus on angels and devils, more needs to be examined with respect to human creatures. According to Plantinga, much of morality has little to do with basic organic biological goals.

Many human beings display a powerful sense of justice and fierce determination to follow it where it leads; they are willing to devote enormous time and energy and sometimes their very lives to trying to right wrongs, defend the weak, uproot a wicked and unjust social system. ...[M]ost of this seems to have very little to do with contributing to such biological goals as survival and reproduction.\[^{157}\]

His list goes on to include human beings who, throughout history, have displayed altruistic tendencies, including Mother Teresa, Jesuit and Methodist missionaries, each risking their lives in the face of accident, disease, and attack. But the list need not only focus on them. Everyday people exemplify altruistic behaviours that have little to do with survival and reproduction. Furthermore, the human characteristic behaviour of being religious has people devoting time, energy, and resources to achieve religious goals. Some become celibate while

\[^{157}\] Ibid., 183.
others sacrifice their lives for proper practice. None of these examples contribute to mere biological goals.

Simply limiting pleasure and pain to the biological goals of survival and reproduction makes sense if one begins evaluating life in the scope of naturalism. There are philosophical nuances when defining naturalism, but one thing encompassing commonality is the denial that any supernatural beings (God, angels, devils) exist in the world. When viewed this way, the meaning of biological pain and pleasure can only be explained in such a framework making the probability of HI more likely than theism. Yet not every individual subscribes to naturalism; theists cannot subscribe to it and maintain their belief in God. Therefore, more attention needs to be paid to how people actually experience pleasure and pain in life that has nothing to do with biological goals. Plantinga elaborates by noting a set of enjoyments in life including simple things like the company of friends, delight in a spring day, listening to Mozart, feeling a bit of gratitude for God’s presence in life and for the offer of grace to us as individuals, those we love, and others. The list goes on and on, but not simply of pleasures. Pain that seems to serve no role in survival or reproduction includes disappointment for a wrong doing, sorrow over past sins that do not seem to go away, anger over other people’s sufferings, etc. Plantinga acknowledges that some have offered that all these things are biologically useful, but finds none of them convincing and even some of them foolish. In other words, some explanations are far from being proved.

Next, Plantinga examines the claim that sentient creatures are not generally happy but that on a theistic account, one would expect them to be. Measuring general happiness is a difficult

\[\text{158 Ibid., 184-185.}\]
undertaking. We simply do not know how happy clams or house flies really are, nor do we know the interior lives of others. Life is a mixture of both happy and sad times. To further the point, why should anyone believe that sentient beings should be happier in the world? According to theists, the world is fallen; people sin and are in need of forgiveness and restoration. So, once again, the epistemic situation for a theist might not necessarily lead to the expectation of abundantly happy sentient beings given a fallen world. One might object to this train of thought that includes religious notions as question begging, but this is unwarranted or irrelevant because such beliefs are part of an individual’s epistemic situation.\textsuperscript{159}

Lastly, Plantinga calls our attention to broader contours of theistic belief that extend far beyond our biological pleasure and pain: that being human experience in eternity. If sorrows in the here and now accord with divine justice and divine love, then the epistemic situation of the theist is vastly more probable than HI.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 186.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 187.
Chapter 5
Analysis and Evaluation

This section of the thesis focuses on the critical analysis of the discourse between Alvin Plantinga and his two main interlocutors, J.L. Mackie and Paul Draper. The first part of this three-part analysis concerns itself with the concept of free will as employed by the authors. By examining the concept of free will, we can further determine whether or not the outcome of the logical problem of evil is coherent. The second part of the analysis explores the different worldviews employed by the authors and how each worldview has a great impact on the interpretation of evil one finds in the world that lends itself to the acceptance or rejection of the existence of God. The third part of this analysis offers additional arguments on how we can better understand the problem of evil within a theistic worldview, giving reason as to why evil does not necessarily warrant atheism or even agnosticism.

The logical arguments for and against the existence of God largely concentrate on the concept of the free will. Whether the focus is the free will of God actualizing a particularly good possible world, or the free will of creatures making moral decisions to act uprightly, free will seems to play a pivotal role. Therefore, it is fitting to begin this analysis by taking an inventory on what we are warranted to say about the will. The first question we need to ask is what exactly free will is. To answer, I have chosen to begin with Immanuel Kant’s rendering of free will. Kant is my preferred starting point, because his views of free will are closely linked to practical (i.e., moral) reasoning. Practical reasoning seems often to fuel evil action in the world, and so, Kant’s tripartite understanding of the will can help shed some light on our inquiry.
According to Kant, the first of three parts of the human will is its power to choose between alternatives (He calls this the *willkür*). The second part is the purely rational aspect (the *wille*), which allows the will to logically reason and compare alternatives in order to choose between them. These two parts provide the rational structure for freedom, experience of obligation, and awareness of the power of volition. The third part of the will is the underlying disposition of the subject. Kant believed that our disposition, be it toward good or evil, is inborn and naturally constituted. It is not acquired in space or time, but is something that we get to choose. As the moral law imposes itself on each subject, the way a person becomes good or evil depends on the person’s subordination to a supreme condition of the subject, which will either be self-love or obedience to the moral law. Much of a person’s bent toward either evil or good is then found in the person’s disposition.\(^{161}\) Keeping all of this in mind, what then can one say about Plantinga’s argument?

Here, John Feinberg is helpful in highlighting a significant insight that impacts whether or not one ought to find the free will defence espoused by Plantinga sound and tenable. According to Feinberg, the free will defence rests on the notion of incompatibilistic freedom, the view that there is a dichotomy between human free will and the deterministic features of the world.\(^{162}\) On this view, being free means to have liberty to choose to act. However, it stands in contrast to hard determinism, the view that everything in the world is determined. It also stands in contrast with soft determinism, also known as compatibilism, the view that free will and determinism are logically compatible ideas. On hard determinism, human


\(^{162}\) Plantinga acknowledges that his view is incompatibilism very clearly but does not say very much about it thereafter.
freedom is an illusion, and on soft determinism, freedom simply means that subjects are unconstrained but are still connected to the deterministic features of the world. Mackie’s argument against the existence of God assumes compatiblistic freedom, whereas Plantinga’s rests on incompatibilist freedom. Given that this is the case, the issue that naturally arises is whether or not the theist has good reason to believe that the incompatibilist view of freedom is correct.

Are there strong reasons for believing that incompatibilism is true? I contend that there are, but in order to demonstrate this, we need to examine the three main contending views of freedom as it pertains to human beings in relation to God. The three views as stated above are: (1) hard determinism; (2) soft determinism (aka. compatibilism); and (3) libertarianism (aka. incompatibilism). Since the debate between Plantinga and Mackie is largely between compatibilism and incompatibilism, I will only briefly examine one form of hard determinism. The reason why I am including this is because there are some who hold to an incredibly strong view of God’s sovereignty and double predestination, that is very close to, if not the same as, hard determinism which makes it worthy of our attention.

**Hard Determinism**

Within theistic debate, various forms of hard determinism persist. Here I will only be critically examining one view, that being the argument given by Baruch Spinoza. In *Ethics*, Spinoza posits, “Substance cannot be produced by anything eternal, it must therefore, be its own cause—that is, its essence necessarily involves existence, or existence belongs to its

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Traditionally, God has been said to be the only necessary being in which existence is part of his essence. What follows from this is that everything that has existence, has its existence in God. The hard deterministic implications of this can be stated as follows:

1. Necessarily, God exists.
2. Necessarily, God has all and only those properties definitive of God’s nature (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience, sovereignty)
3. Necessarily, God’s choices are determined by God’s nature.
4. Therefore, necessarily, whatever is true is true because God chose that it be true.

If hard deterministic theism is true, it would mean that every truth is a necessary truth and every falsehood is a necessary falsehood, and that there is only one possible world. It seems intuitive for us to think that there could have been other ways that things could have been, especially with respect to evil in the world. But, if everything is necessary, then there are no other ways things could have been. The upshot of Spinozistic theism is that, if true, every feeling, mental image, dream, desire, movement, attitude, pain or pleasure experienced by humans is deliberately caused by God. It also means that God caused these things necessarily. However, this is deeply problematic for our understanding of ethics, because it would imply that our thinking, deliberating, desiring, and feeling are truly not our own, stripping away human moral agency and even personhood. It would also imply that all of human thoughts and actions flow necessarily from God’s nature or being, giving us no ground to believe that humans have actual moral responsibility and obligation.

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Compatibilism and Incompatibilism

Next, we examine the compatibilist (soft deterministic) view of free will in comparison to incompatibilism (libertarianism). By doing so, we can highlight their differences clearly. Compatibilism is the view that freedom of the will and causal, but not logical, determinism are compatible. On the contrary, incompatibilism contends that freedom of the will and any sort of determinism, be it causal or logical, is incompatible. What this means for incompatibilism is that necessarily, if we are free, then we are not determined, and that necessarily, if we are determined, either logically or causally, we are not free. According to J.P. Moreland, in order to tease out crucial differences between the two, we have to consider at least three conditions: (1) the ability condition; (2) the control condition; and (3) the rationality condition.165

The Ability Condition

A necessary condition for an agent to do something freely is that the agent must have the ability to have done otherwise, meaning that the agent could have willed to have done otherwise or could have refrained from willing to do the thing he or she did. Compatibilists and incompatibilists agree on this; however, for the incompatibilist, a dual categorical ability is implied. This is a two-way ability not conditioned upon anything. Simply put, if one is free with respect to action A, then it is within one’s power to do A and also to refrain from doing A. Moreover, one’s ability to have done otherwise is not conditioned by something else in that person, such as a wish or desire. The compatibilist, however, views the ability to have done otherwise as a hypothetical ability. To elaborate, the compatibilist believes one

could do otherwise, if one wished or wanted to do otherwise, but since wants and wishes are determined, what this amounts to is that the ability to choose otherwise is a one-way ability in contrast to a dual categorical ability contended by the incompatibilist.

The Control Condition

The control condition states that a necessary condition for an agent to do something freely is that the agent be in control of the action. Both compatibilists and incompatibilists agree on this, but they disagree on what constitutes control over an action. The compatibilist views causation as event-event causation, meaning that every event in the universe is entailed by prior states of the universe in conjunction with the laws of nature. Compatibilists employ the causal theory of action which states that an action is free only if the action is under the agent’s control, meaning that the causal chain of events leading up to the agent’s action run through his or her beliefs or desires. Incompatibilists contend that this compatibilist control is really pseudo-control. To give an analogy, it would be like saying a guided missile is under control of its course, if its wiring is correct. This, however, does not appear to be genuine freedom. Incompatibilist control requires the agent to be the first unmoved mover for an action, if it is truly under the agent’s control.166

The Rationality Condition

According to the rationality condition, a necessary condition for an agent to do something freely is that the agent has a personal reason for why it is done. Again, here, both compatibilists and incompatibilists agree that responsible actions are those that are done in

light of certain beliefs, desires, preferences, and the like. Where they disagree is regarding the role of a reason in an action’s being freely performed. Compatablists view reasons as efficient causes, whereas incompatiblists view reason in terms of final causes. An efficient cause is that by means of which an effect is produced. A final cause is that for the sake of which an effect is produced. In other words, the final cause is the purpose.

An Argument for Incompatiblism

Now that we have explored some of the major differences between determinism, compatiblism and incompatiblism, the following formalized argument can be made to show the rationale as to why incompatiblism is to be preferred.

1. Sometimes we are morally responsible for our actions.
2. Free will is a precondition for a morally responsible action.
3. If we are morally responsible for some actions, then we have free will.
4. Therefore, we have free will.
5. If we have free will, causal determinism is false.
6. If hard determinism is true, then our actions are the products of God’s prior decrees.
7. No one has any choice about what God decrees.
8. Therefore, our actions are not up to us.
9. Therefore, if hard determinism is true, we have no free will.
10. If we have no free will, we cannot be moral agents.
11. If free will does not exist then moral agents cannot be the cause of moral evil.
12. Evil exists.
13. God cannot be the primary cause of evil.
14. Therefore, if God is not the primary cause of evil, other moral agents are the secondary cause of evil.
15. Therefore hard determinism is false.
16. If we have free will, hard determinism and compatiblism are false.
Indeterminism is true.
Therefore, incompatibilism is true.
The arguments presented here all rest upon the strongly intuitive assumption of the first premise that sometimes we are morally responsible for our actions. If this intuitively strong premise is denied, then Plantinga’s free will defence will waver, and Mackie’s argument against the existence of God will gain much traction. As stated above, if God is somehow primarily and not merely secondarily responsible for evil in the world, then contradictions arise between an omnibenevolent God and the author of evil. With that said, I can see no good reason to believe why compatibilism or hard determinism ought to be preferred over incompatibilism. For one, it seems that experientially, human beings actively make some choices to do good or evil in the world on a daily basis. One might object and argue that such choices are governed by the hard wired biological drive for survival and reproduction and that our free will is an illusion, but one would have to argue first that the naturalistic worldview is true and that theism is false. We shall explore this in greater detail in the following section that concentrates on the probabilistic argument against the existence of God, but thus far I have presented arguments that warrant or even favour of incompatibilist or libertarian freedom.

The Evidential Problem of Evil Analyzed

While the logical problem of evil concentrates its questions on possibility, the evidential problem of evil focuses on probability. The evidential problem is more threatening to theism because it challenges the theist to give a response to the amount of evil observed in the world. The majority of atheists, agnostics, and even some theists share the principle that if God does exist, we should expect that God should not allow meaningless evil to exist in a
The challenge for the theist, then, is to come up with an argument to show that the amount of evil in the world is what one might expect to see, if God intends to allow it to happen. Based on his naturalistic analysis, Draper argued that, on biological grounds of survival and reproduction, theism falls short in this area of probability, whereas Plantinga drew a different conclusion, based on his calculations relative to a theistic worldview. Was Plantinga successful in showing that the theist is not unreasonable based on probability? To answer this question we need to begin by analyzing what “success” means. Does a successful argument here demand that the theist give a theodicy for the observable evil in the world? Is the “why” question of unexplainable evils necessary to answer? I do not think that it is, or even possible to answer with a finite mind. This, however, should not count against rational belief in theism, because the burden of proof does not lie on the theist, but rather the non-theist, because the non-theist needs to show that were God to exist, God possibly could not have a purpose behind unexplainable evils throughout all space and time. This is an enormous undertaking for the non-theist. Creatures in space and time are not in a position to see things from a God’s eye point-of-view.

Unlike matter or time, evil is difficult to quantify. Both Draper and Plantinga address this and recognize that a broader metaphysical analysis is much needed, hence the need for probabilities to be calculated, relative to worldviews. Unfortunately, quantities, measurements, and statistics are not as useful in metaphysical discourse as they are within the hard sciences. Since probability deals with the assigned likelihood of numerical value and neither evil nor good are quantifiable in easily defined units, we need to accept that a

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successful argument here will not resemble a successful argument for a scientific hypothesis. A successful argument must then find its success based on a wider spectrum of knowledge.

If our consideration scope of good and evil is merely naturalistic, then any supernatural interpretation of them is precluded as unadmitted. As a result, Draper would certainly argue successfully because what we experience with our bodily senses in the natural world under the naturalistic worldview, makes the amount of humanly unexplainable evil seem purposeless, weighing the argument in favour of the Hypothesis of Indifference. However, one does not have to accept the naturalistic worldview as a fair default starting point. Metaphysically, one can—and is at liberty to—choose any starting point, whether that be naturalistic or theistic. Unfortunately, because a polarized worldview of either theism or naturalism tends to be at the core of a person’s web of beliefs, the theist will assign the \( a \) \textit{priori} probability of God’s existence as 1 and respectively, so will the naturalist.\footnote{Richard M. Gale in Deane-Peter Baker, ed., \textit{Alvin Plantinga} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 60.} This does not mean that the final word on the matter of God’s existence is relative. God either exists or he does not. I would suggest that the analysis needs to start in a neutral place and see where the evidence best leads. Perhaps that neutral place is found in something experienced and accepted by all, that being in narratives. Within the methodological section of this thesis, I explicitly stated a critical realist approach would be used throughout, but critical realism on its own is not enough to move the problem of evil forward, since coherence is a virtue, and a compelling case needs to include deductive (logical), inductive (probability or evidential), and abductive (coherent narrative) argumentation. A coherent narrative could include narrative texts but also narratives from the physical sciences, that is, how the theory of evolution took place. I believe that what can best help facilitate further
discussion on problems of evil is to stop searching for a timeless knock down formulaic
argument for or against the existence of God. The formulaic approach to settling issues
about God’s existence leaves the individual—in the end—either choosing faith or doubt.\footnote{169}

In a way this is ultimately unavoidable, but a narrative approach adds new living colour to
discussion. When the problem of evil is expressed through story—and for the Reformed
theist, it would be a story about the God hypothesis—we are more inclined to be moved in a
life receiving way, rather than a dismal, life-taking way. In the Reformed Christian tradition,
the God hypothesis is one where a wise god sees that allowing the possibility of evil action to
free willed creatures will only result in an overall better world and better eternity. In a way,
the question that needs to be asked is, what makes for the greatest possible and feasible story
about existence and experience? Even though God could have created a different world than
the one we live in, God might have preferred to actualize a world where creatures made in his
image with free will and the capacity to truly love, unfortunately turn away in selfish
rebellion. And rather than leaving such creatures orphaned in the universe to suffer alone
and self-destruct, God chooses to suffer with them by becoming one of them, suffering as
they suffer to the point of being put to death by the very creatures he came to save, paying
their debt of rebellion with his own creaturely body. This certainly sounds like it might be
among the greatest possible narratives one could imagine. Plantinga addresses this

\footnote{169 Pascal captures this well when he writes, ”Willing to appear openly to those who seek him with all
their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from him with all their heart, God so regulates the knowledge
of himself that he has given indications of himself, which are visible to those who seek him and not to those
who do not seek him. There is enough light for those to see who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for
118.}
possibility in “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa’.” Whether the story is true or not is debatable. Again, in the end we are left with faith or doubt. But rather than remaining at a logical standstill, a narrative approach dealing with evil might be the way to reduce it in the world, since all humans, atheists, agnostics, and theists live out one or more story. Perhaps the Islamic narrative has much to teach us about God and how obedience to him can help reduce evil in the world, or the Buddhist narrative, or first people’s indigenous narratives, and so on. One of the hardships that the staunch naturalist has to address is finding meaning in suffering caused by evil, since within the naturalist worldview there is no ultimate meaning to life, only temporal meaning that ends when we breath our last breath. I do not think that this, itself, can be considered one of the great narratives, especially since the naturalist cannot successfully prove that life beyond the grave is impossible. Naturalism does not have adequate tools for dealing with evil, because under its paradigm we cannot hope for an everlasting life. Believing in the possibility of a God not only helps us understand ourselves from a God point-of-view but also helps the quality of our lives, even in our brokenness. It could help us find aesthetic beauty in the world despite all the wrong we witness around us. A good story is not one that begins with characters that do not struggle and suffer no hardships, or with characters living in a meaningless world. Rather, a good story is one where character development happens throughout all the challenges, where drama takes place, and ultimately, in the end, love triumphs and good wins over evil. Such a story not only sounds good, but also accounts for the peculiarity of morality we experience on a day to day basis. In “Religion and the Queerness of Morality,” George Mavrodes argues

171 For a possible understanding of how a “soul building theodicy” might be possible, see John Hick, Evil and the God of Love. (London: Macmillan, 1966).
that a nonreligious world, morality, taken to mean moral realism, is odd or absurd. He begins
with the assumption that morality is not odd or absurd and concludes with the proposition
that the actual world is not nonreligious but that some religious worldview is true, hence,
giving meaning to the legitimacy of morality. 172

To add a narrative approach to understanding ourselves in light of evil in the world is helpful
all the more to the analytic mind, especially since analytic methodology has been accused of
being hemianopian—that is, it narrowly focuses on left-brain processing skills while ignoring
important narrative sources dictated by the right-brain, that convey non-propositional
information about the person. Nonetheless, this should not diminish analytic philosophy of
religion from continuing on; including narrative into the discourse on evil can only prove to
be helpful. Eleonore Stump writes,

> It is therefore misleadingly imprecise, I think, to diagnose the weakness of analytic
philosophy as its narrowness…. One idea, then, for addressing the shortcomings of
analytic philosophy while preserving its characteristic excellences is to marry it to the
study of narrative… [A]nalytic philosophy can use its strengths to diagnose its own
weaknesses. Analytic reason can see what analytic reason cannot see; and, having
seen it, it can correct for its defects and limitations by bolstering itself with the
cognitive virtues embodied in other intellectual endeavours. So one way to
compensate for the limitations of analytic philosophy as regards philosophical
problems such as the problem of evil is to reflect on them by drawing on the insights
of narratives as well as the results of contemporary analytic discussions. 173

For too long, non-theists have struggled with the idea, not that it is impossible for God to
exist, but the question of how a perfect, omnipotent God could exist in light of all the
horrendous evil, such as that which came from the holocaust or 9-11. Some philosophers of
religion have suggested that it is not in God’s power to do anything about horrendous evil,

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172 George I. Mavrodes, “Religion and the Queerness of Morality” in Charles Taliaferro and Paul J.

173 Michael Rae and Oliver Crisp, ed., Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology
because he is not powerful enough to do anything about it.\textsuperscript{174} As I see it, we are not forced to take such a route. If we shift our understanding of God as being all powerful but also one who suffers with us in our darkest moments, we find a God who is in ultimate control and is willing to suffer with us in a relatable way. If we deny a suffering God our understanding of God coupled with our experience yields dissonance. Marilyn McCord Adams writes:

> Because Divine and created natures are incommensurate, God will be unclassifiable relative to any merely human order (social, political, international) or to any human perception of natural order. Since we are unable to fit Him into any of our categories, we experience God as wholly other, and therefore as utterly unpredictable, as arbitrary power, at once dangerous and attractive. Yet, because God and creatures are so radically different in kind, and because roles not only confer identity but define relationships, it is difficult to see how God and humans ever could be “at one,” occupying the same social world.\textsuperscript{175}

When we come to understand God’s ultimate faithfulness and willingness to suffer with us in the world, we can learn to understand how God can possibly reconcile all things to himself and, one day, rid the world of evil, where tears are wiped away, and where suffering will be behind us.


Chapter 6

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have surveyed various authors discoursing on the problem of evil. I have analyzed their arguments and presented a strong Christian Reformed case to resolve the problem itself. The problem of evil is a problem not only left for creation to solve on its own, but involves a creator God, one who suffers and eminently dwells among us in bad times as well as good. In this light, evil is best thought of as the alien of nothingness that we fight against. In ‘God and Nothingness’ Karl Barth tells us that only a broken theology, a theology that renounces systematic totalization, can properly work toward eliminating evil in the world. A broken theology helps us to understand how the reality of evil and the reality of God’s goodness along with his creation are irreconcilable. The nothingness of evil is hostile to God, and its corruption always stands in stark contrast to God’s character. On its own, analytic theologizing is limited to what it is able to prove or disprove. However, when we allow narratives and other modes of thinking to influence our understanding of reality and the nature of evil, we can then make more progress in overcoming it. A narrative that posits a God who relates to us and is present in helping eliminate evil is not only possible but rather probable, given the state of the world. And that he suffers with us should only console us and empower us all the more in our time of need. To go one step further, as the Reformed Christian sees it, God is the farthest thing from a watchmaker who creates the world and then sits back in distant observance. He shares in the suffering of the world. Alvin Plantinga said it well:

[God] endures the anguish of seeing his son, the second person of the Trinity, consigned to the bitterly cruel and shameful death of the cross. …God’s capacity for

176 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Study Edition 18 (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), section 50, 1-78.
suffering, … is proportional to his greatness; it exceeds our capacity for suffering in
the same measure as his capacity for knowledge exceeds ours. Christ was prepared to
endure the agonies of hell itself; and God, the Lord of the universe, was prepared to
endure the suffering consequent upon his son’s humiliation and death. He was
prepared to accept this suffering in order to overcome sin, and death, and the evils
that afflict our world, and to confer on us a life more glorious that we can imagine.
So we don’t know why God permits evil; we do know, however, that he was prepared
to suffer on our behalf, to accept suffering of which we can form no conception.177

If we are persuaded by this narrative, what then should our human response be? Our posture
when entering into it should be of gratitude and obedience to God. Realizing that God
establishes much goodness and order in the world through people, by obedience to God’s
commandments we are able to make real heaven on earth.178 When we think about our fight
against evil in the world theologically in terms of rebellion against creation itself we can
better align our desires with those of God’s. Engaging with theological language such as
“sin” helps us to understand that part of the problem of evil is human violation against God
and his creation.179 It is unfortunate that such language has been lost in the public arenas of
debate. When we allow such concepts to influence the way we think about evil, the problem
of evil can be seen as our problem against which to fight and not a problem about God’s
existence. In that case, if evil is to be diminished it will require not so much a theoretical
response, as a practical response. John Douglas Hall writes,

…Everything that we read about the suffering of the church in the newer Testament
reminds us that the earliest Christians regarded their suffering as the mode and sign of
their participation in the suffering of the Christ. Theirs was not a theoretical approach

177 Alvin Plantinga, “Self-Profile,” in Alvin Plantinga, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen,

178 Of this Jon Levenson states, “It is in those elusive but ever available moments that the deeply flawed
present is forced to yield to the perfect future. And it is in this idea of the multileveled act of unification—
unification in God, in creation, and in the human self—that we find the deep root of the profound theology…”

179 Marjorie Suchocki. The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology. (New York:
Continuum, 1994), 16, 63.
to suffering! Not only did they bear witness to a Messiah who participated fully in the human condition—who “though he was in the form of God…emptied himself… and became obedient unto death” (Phil. 2:6-8), but they regarded their own being as *soma Christou* as an ongoing participation in the Christ’s participatory life.¹⁸⁰

The more we voluntarily participate in the life of Christ the more we are able to neutralize the various forms of evil within our surroundings. But participation might require us to revalue the place or even conception of the self, what it is, and what powers it possess (i.e. imagination, memory, perception, creation, and the like). Unfortunately, that topic will have to wait for an undertaking of its own. At the end of this undertaking, we can confidently conclude that significant ground in theorizing about the problem of evil has been covered, and even more has been suggested for the future. Hopefully we now have a better understanding that the problem of evil ends where our participation in God’s redemptive work begins.

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