AS SPARKS FLY UPWARD

"For man is born for trouble as sparks fly upward."
Job 5:7

A Study Of The Problem Of Evil
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INTRODUCTION: THE WEIGHT OF EVIL

> "Rebellion? I am sorry you call it that," said Ivan earnestly. " One can hardly live in rebellion, and I want to live. Tell me yourself, I challenge you—answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance— and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth."
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> "No, I wouldn't consent," said Alyosha softy.[1]
> —*The Brothers Karamazov*, by Fyordor Dostoevsky—

In his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* Fyodor Dostoevsky probes the universal problem encountered by every soul who has ever lived, lives, or will live. This is the weight of evil that lays heavy on the life of every person. From the moment the newborn child descends the birth canal to the last gasping breath of the aged person, evil, pain, and suffering are the inevitable burden born by every person. Or, as Eliphaz tells the anguished Job, "For man is born for trouble as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

In his book *God, Freedom, and Evil* the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga recalls an earlier portion in Dostoevsky's novel where the unbeliever Ivan has a conversation with his brother, a Christian. Ivan is detailing to Alyosha a catalog of evils of which he has heard. Though it is a novel, the reports Dostoevsky puts in the mouth of Ivan were, in fact, based on actual events that had recently occurred in Russia and elsewhere.[2] One of those stories involved events from the Russo-Turkish war, perhaps at the massacre at Batak, Bulgaria in April/May 1876.

> "By the way, a Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow," Ivan went on, seeming not to hear his brother's words, "told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fences, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them – all sorts of things you can't imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that's all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from the mother's womb, and tossing babies up in the air and

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[1] Fyordor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett, (Chicago, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1952), 126, 127

[2] Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky, A Writer in His Time*, (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2010), 869

catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mothers' eyes. Doing it before the mothers' eyes was what gave zest to the amusement. Here is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They've planned a diversion: they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn't it? By the way, Turks are particularly fond of sweet things, they say."[3]

The mind staggers at such unimaginable evil. Yet, tragically, in our modern day it is all too imaginable. In fact, such horrific atrocities of evil performed by mankind on fellow humans are not merely a feature of modern society, but have plagued mankind for as long as man can remember. But as if this were not enough, we must also cope with other horrible tragedies that have nothing to do with man's "inhumanity" to his fellow creatures. Philosopher William Lane Craig breaks our hearts with two stories he recalls from television reports in 1985.

"In Mexico City a terrible earthquake had devastated blocks of high-rise apartment buildings. As rescue teams in the aftermath of the quake searched the rubble for survivors, they came across a ten–year-old boy who was trapped alive somewhere in the recesses of a collapsed building. During the next several days, the whole world watched in agony as the teams tried to remove the rubble to get to the boy. They could communicate with him, but could not reach him. His grandfather, who had been trapped with him, was already dead. "I'm scared!" he cried. After about eleven days, there was silence. Alone in the darkness, trapped without food and water, afraid, the little boy died before the rescue teams could free him.

That same year a mudslide swept over a village in Colombia. As rescuers came to help survivors, they came across a little girl who was pinned up to her chin in muddy water. For some reason or other, they could not free her or remove the water. All they could do was stand by helplessly and watch her die. Every night on the news we saw film of the little girl's decline. It was the most pathetic sight I have every seen. She stood there, unable to move, spitting out the water that continually flowed into her mouth. As the days went by, she became exhausted, and deep black circles formed under her eyes. She was dying before our very eyes, as we watched on television. Finally, the evening newscaster reported that she was gone."[4]

No normal person can be untouched by such accounts of evil, of suffering, and of human anguish. The initial human response to such things is almost instinctively, WHY? As a younger Christian, I was often taught that it was wrong to ask God why, or to ask

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[3] Dostoevsky, 122, 123

[4] William Lane Craig, *On Guard*, (Colo. Sprgs., CO, David C. Cook), 151, 152.

why God does things or permits the things He does. Thankfully, I have learned that it is wholly appropriate to reverently ask God for answers to such difficult things.

But the evil that abounds in the world around us leads us to ask not only why such evil happens, but even more fundamentally we may be asking whether or not a good and all powerful God even exists, given the presence of evil and the extent of evil in the world. Other questions, too, assail the mind in the face of evil. What is evil? Who made evil? Does evil have any purpose? What about all the "natural" evils we witness such as tsunamis, floods, earthquakes, plagues, famines, etc.? Is evil just an illusion, as millions of people believe? Will there ever be an end to my suffering?

It is just these kinds of questions I wish to address in the following pages. Though I will touch on the perspectives of evil from other worldviews, I approach the subject as a Christian theist. By this I mean that I share beliefs common to all theists, such as the existence of an almighty God and of real transcendent evil. Additionally, I hold to specifically Christian beliefs such as the authority of the Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of sin, and the redemption that is in Jesus. It is from this viewpoint that I write, and it is in these and other Christian truths that I seek to find the answers to our questions about evil.

A point of clarification is in order before we go much further. On the title page I describe this effort as a study of the *problem of evil*. This particular phrase can have any number of meanings to various people. Any of the questions about evil which I listed above, as well as others I did not detail, can constitute a real "problem" to the person who is struggling with it. Sometimes the problem of evil may be somewhat of an abstract question asked by a philosopher or someone attempting to construct a rational grid for understanding life. Sometimes it can be a deeply personal and emotional problem, such as for a mother who has just lost a child to cancer or a car accident. In time, I will address several of these dimensions.

It is important to realize, though, that the phrase *problem of evil* sometimes is used in a fairly technical sense by people such as philosophers and theologians. These kinds of people are committed to trying to provide the rest of us with reasonable explanations for the lives we live and experience. One of the things such people try to understand is God. Does He exist, and if so, what is He like? The subject of evil presents a particular challenge to such endeavors. When philosophers and theologians refer to the problem of evil, they often have a very particular thing in mind. Specifically, they are referring to the challenge that the existence of evil has historically been believed to present to belief in the existence of God. I refer to this as the intellectual problem of evil and will explain more about this later. This problem of evil has several subdivisions within it, as the reader will soon learn.

It is my intention to address the idea of the problem of evil both in this technical sense, as well as in the more general ways that we often use the term. I will do my best to help the reader know and understand exactly how I am using the phrase at any particular point in my presentation.

So, where do we begin? It seems the best place to begin is by making sure that we understand exactly what we mean by evil when we speak of it.

EVIL: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT ISN'T

In light of the true stories we've just considered, to ask the question "What is evil?" may initially seem like a frivolous query best left for stodgy old philosophers or ivory tower theologians. After all, everyone knows what evil is, right? It's all around us. We see it every day. It's not like evil is some difficult concept to grasp.

By way of illustration, in 1964 the United States Supreme Court was wrestling with the question of whether of not a particular film could be banned by the State of Ohio for being obscene. Ultimately, the court ruled that it could not. Justice Potter Stewart issued a one paragraph opinion concurring with the majority in which he penned perhaps the best known line from any of the Court's many decisions. Unable to come up with any kind of a precise definition of what he called "hard core pornography," he opted for a far more subjective measure. He wrote: "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description, and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. *But I know it when I see it*, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that."[5] (Italics mine.) His use of the colloquialism "But I know it when I see it" has become legendary.

Unfortunately, I suspect that for many who would opine about the subject of evil, we do so with no clear definition in our minds of our subject, and so, like Justice Stewart, we default to the more ambiguous, "I know it when I see it." Such an ambiguous and subjective view of evil will not be of much help when we are forced, as we inevitably will be, to confront some of the most troubling questions that arise from the experience of evil in our lives.

Furthermore, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, there are some widely divergent views of what evil is, or even whether or not it exists. This is more true than a typical twenty-first century Westerner might expect. And these widely divergent views of evil suggest radically different approaches to the problems and crises which the experience of evil forces us to confront. So, I would propose that to ask and answer with care the question "What is evil?" is of greater relevance and import to us than we might imagine.

To answer this question, we will examine some of a few alternative views of evil which are common within the assorted worldviews which vie for our allegiance. Each of these views of evil appears to come with its own inherit problem or difficulty.

An Atheist View Of Evil

There are today four common views on the nature of evil. One is the view of atheism and metaphysical naturalism (or physicalism).[6] To the metaphysical naturalist, the universe is a completely contained and closed system, and everything that happens

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[5] Potter Stewart, Justice, Concurring Opinion, SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES, 378 U.S. 184, Jacobellis v. Ohio

[6] Ronald H. Nash, "The Problem of Evil," in Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, J. P. Moreland, eds., *To Everyone An Answer*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004), 211

within this system is mechanically and physically determined. There is nothing that exists outside of this closed system—not God, nor good, nor evil—that has any relevance or bearing within the system.

Under this view, when it is consistently applied, evil may be recognized as real, in a relativistic sense, yet it is purely a natural phenomenon. It is the product of completely random events and processes within the material or mechanical world. Ultimately, to such an atheist, evil has no meaningful moral dimension. Whether one is discussing a brutal soldier shooting laughing babies in the head, or little girls drowning in Colombia, all evil is no more than the inevitable process of natural phenomenon and natural selection.

Hence, to the metaphysical naturalist, which is the typical atheistic position, both good and evil are relative rather than transcendent. There are no such things as transcendent values which are imposed upon the universe from "outside." Evil is what I choose to consider evil, and good what I choose to consider good. Therefore both good and evil are no more than what we, as purely materially evolved phenomena choose to make them.

This is a very difficult position to hold with any consistency. When ensconced in the ivy halls of academia, it is quite easy to pontificate about all good and evil being relative. But everything within the human heart and human experience cries out against such a view. I have never known any atheist or philosophical naturalist that would not have recoiled in horror at the stories I related at the outset of this presentation. It is one thing to assert that one cannot judge Hitler for the atrocities he propagated on the world, it is quite another thing to remain emotionally and intellectually detached when one's car is stolen from the driveway, or when, God forbid, one's little daughter is raped and murdered by a neighbor.

Many atheists assert that they indeed can propose values of good and evil that apply to all people. Indeed, I have personally known atheists who certainly appear to be upstanding citizens and generally good people. They live by most of the same general values of good and evil that most theists employ. Not only that, but they also insist that others also live by the same values or else face the consequences. It is difficult to see, however, a rationale for their ethical mores that does not counter their ideological confession.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, many atheists and metaphysical naturalists seek to disprove the legitimacy of theism in general, and of Christian theism in particular, by arguing that the problem of evil (which I will define in detail in that chapter) proves the logical impossibility of theism. The problem is, however, that as Dr. Ronald Nash, professor of Christian Philosophy at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville) points out:

> Whenever they seek to raise problems for Christians by pointing to this or that instance of evil, they do so in terms that are not consistent with their naturalistic and relativistic understanding of things.[7]

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[7] Nash, 212

A Pantheist View Of Evil

A second view of the nature of evil that has billions of believers worldwide, is Pantheism. Pantheism is a general category of faith that embraces a variety of religions such as Zen Buddhism and Hinduism.[8] Western expressions of Pantheism can also be found in the New Age worldview and various aspects of Western pop culture.

Central to Pantheism's view of evil is its understanding of what we Westerners typically think of as reality. To the pantheist, the entire world in which we live and move, and all the experiences we encounter in this world, are actually only an illusion. Hence, evil, pain, and suffering are likewise simply an illusion. Once one has achieved an enlightened state, he or she is freed from all such illusions.

A thoroughgoing Christian answer to pantheism is beyond the intent or scope of this presentation. However, a couple of observations are in order.

Norman Geisler and Peter Bochinno demonstrate in their book *Unshakeable Foundations* that to say that reality is an illusion is itself an illusion. They do this by applying the laws of logic, particularly the *law of identity*. Essentially, they argue that to know that something is an illusion, one must have some measuring device, which in this case must be reality. Illusion is shown to be illusion by comparison against what is real.

As was the case with the atheist's/naturalist's view of evil, the pantheist's view of evil is very difficult, if not impossible, to live with consistently. In his book *The Lotus and the Cross* Ravi Zaharias shows how impossible it is for someone in the midst of great suffering to find any real help or release in the idea that their suffering is not actually real.[9] The fact is, of course, that the experience of evil and suffering is so universal and, at times, so intense that it is virtually impossible to practically deny its reality.

A Religious Dualist View Of Evil

A third view of evil that finds wide acceptance is that of Dualism. This ancient answer to the problem of evil offers, in opposition to Christian monotheism, the view that there are two co-equal, co-eternal gods, one good, the other evil. A more modern and populist version of this worldview is expressed in the exceptionally popular Star Wars movies, in which Luke Skywalker must learn to cope with the Force, learning to use the good or light side of the force to defeat the dark side.

Some who hold to otherwise Christian beliefs are at times caught up in such religious dualism. It is important, therefore, to point out that Satan, who plays a prominent role in the Christian view of evil, does not fit into the dualistic view of God. According to the Bible, Satan is a created, finite being. He is clearly under God's authority, as is the rest of the creation.[10]

So, while Satan is described as a liar and the father of lies, and though he is thoroughly evil, evil is not Satan. Evil is not a person called Satan. This is an important distinction that I shall develop later.

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[8] Norman Geisler, Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations*, (Bloomington, MN, Bethany House Pub., 2001), 59

[9] Ravi Zacharias, *The Lotus And The Cross*, audio CD, (Hovel Audio, 2005): Originally pub; *The Lotus and the Cross; Jesus Talks with Buddha*, (Portland, OR, Multnomah Pub., 2001)

[10] Job 1:6-12; Ezekiel 28:19

Ronald Nash demonstrates the problems with religious dualism with three points.[11] 1) Dualism offers no rationale for determining which god is the good god and which is the evil god. 2) Dualism provides no definitive content for an absolute standard. Is the absolute standard good or evil?[12] 3) Dualism requires an appeal to one monistic principle. Since there must be one ultimate Good that stands over the two finite gods of light and darkness, neither of those two gods can be God. Dualism's logical failure thus renders it unable to satisfactorily address the problem of evil.

A Christian View Of Evil

So, then, what is evil to the Christian? Before answering the question directly, it will be helpful to point out what evil is not. Improperly identifying what evil is leads to other difficulties when we begin to ask where evil comes from, or whether or not God created evil.

For example, the following syllogism illustrates the problem:
1) God is the creator of everything.
2) Evil is something.
3) Therefore, God created evil.[13]

Obviously, the Christian believes God is all good and could never create anything evil. But, if the above syllogism is true, the Christian's view of God is false. How then does the Christian avoid this apparently unavoidable conclusion? To answer this question, the biblical view of the nature of evil is critical. Evil is something only in the sense that it is real, but evil is not something physical or a being.

For example, evil is not a person, such as in the sense of the dualistic "evil god." I am not saying that people or persons are not evil, but rather that evil is not a sentient being such as a god, or fallen angel, or other spiritual or physical being from which all evil in the universe emanates. This is an important distinction. Satan is evil. He has made evil choices and is so fallen in his moral quality as to possess only evil moral attributes. Further, by his choice to rebel against God he introduced or actualized (as I will show later) evil into God's perfect creation. But all of that, nevertheless, is not to say that the locus and essence of evil is a being from which all evil emanates, not even Satan.

Neither is evil a force such the Dark Side in the Star Wars films. Such a Force would be understood to be some disembodied energy force that exists within the universe and is the root of all evil. This is similar to the idea that evil is a person, except that in this case evil possesses no characteristics of personality but is rather simply an energy force. As I have already shown, such a view of evil is a version of dualism, which fails as a logical system.

It is important not to confuse the Apostle Paul's teaching about sin in Romans with ideas of sin or evil as such a force. Paul uses anthropomorphic terms in Romans to describe the effect of sin on the individual. He speaks of being "sold to sin," of being a

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[11] Nash, 209-211

[12] Citing C. S. Lewis, Nash shows good is always primary and evil is always a corruption of some prior good. (e.g. Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader in Star Wars)

[13] Norman L. Geisler, Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1990), 60

"slave to sin," of sin "dying" and coming "alive."[14] Paul's anthropomorphisms are a literary device to communicate the overwhelming effect of sin in an individual's life. But nowhere do Paul or the other biblical writers speak of sin or evil as some identifiable energy force external to the individual.

Finally, evil is not an entity, a thing, or a substance. There is not some glob or thing out there somewhere in the universe that is evil, and from which all incidences of evil emanate.

So, how then can the Christian maintain the reality of evil if he or she insists that it is not a thing or person or force?

Essentially, the Christian maintains the reality of evil while denying it is a thing or substance by pointing out that evil possesses one of two complementary dimensions. Either evil is the absence of good, or evil consists of good things in improper relationship to one another.[15]

First, evil is viewed as the absence of good. When good is absent, that is evil. For example, human sight is a good thing. When it is missing, the condition or state of blindness exists. That condition is bad. Blindness is not a substance or a "thing." Yet it is real. So it is possible for there to be a reality which is not a substance or a thing. Another example is love. Love is good. When love is absent, evil exists. The Apostle Paul touches on this understanding of evil when he discusses faith. Faith in God is a good thing. Whenever faith if absent, however, sin exists. He says, "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

The second dimension of the nature of evil consists in otherwise good things existing in an improper relationship outside of their created purpose. The lungs of the human body are a good thing. Similarly, water is a good thing. Without water the human body would cease to function. But when there is an improper relationship of water and human lungs, suffering or death ensues and evil exists.

In both of these cases, either the absence of good or the improper relationship of good things, we see that evil is real, yet it is not a thing, a person, or a force. All evil, both moral and natural, can be identified with one of these two dimensions of evil.

Both of these realities, as I have shown, are not things. Rather, they are what is called a "state of affairs."[16] They are a states of affairs in which either good is absent, or in which otherwise good things exist in an improper relationship. So, what we have discovered is that evil is not a thing or a being, but rather evil is a *state of affairs*.

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[14] Romans 6:17-20; 7:8, 9; 7:14

[15] Geisler, Brooks, 61

[16] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, reprint, (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1977) (Orig. pub. Harper and Row, 1974), 34. Plantinga defines a state of affairs as the way things are.

DID GOD CREATE EVIL?

Returning now to the syllogism we considered earlier, we can see that the Christian does not view the second premise of the syllogism to be true. Evil is not a "thing," therefore the syllogism is not true.

But wait. Someone might argue that although evil is not a thing in the sense of being an object or a person, since it is a reality it must therefore be something which God has created. Of course now the syllogism has been altered in two significant ways. Now we are speaking not of God creating things, but God creating reality. Second, we are no longer asserting that evil is a thing, but rather that it is a real state of affairs. So, now the syllogism is reworded to say:

1) God created all reality.
2) Evil is a real state of affairs.
3) Therefore God created evil.

In this case, the Christian's objection is not to the second premise of the syllogism, but to the first premise, the one that says God created all reality. Philosophers do not speak of states of affairs being made or created. Rather, they speak of them being *actualized*. Creation refers to things, substances, persons, etc. But states of affairs are none of these. States of affairs are the way things are.[17] The Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga says:

> …we must note that God does not, strictly speaking, *create* any possible worlds or states of affairs at all. What He creates are the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. But He has not created states of affairs.[18]

As an example, we speak of Adam and Eve as persons who were created. We speak of their walking through the garden as a state of affairs that has been made to happen or been actualized. Plantinga gives some other examples: Nixon's having won the 1972 election, 7 + 5's being equal to 12, all men's being mortal, and Gary, Indiana's having a really nasty pollution problem. (Plantinga was writing this in the mid 1970's.) These are all states of affairs, the way things are, or were when Plantinga wrote this.

While it is true that God initially created all things that came into being, it is not true that God actualizes all states of affairs.[19] For example, according to Genesis, God created Adam and Eve, and placed them in the Garden.[20] Imagine a few days later that Adam and Eve decided to have a picnic on the grassy banks of the river, near the budding chestnut tree. Now we say that Adam and Eve were created. But we do not say that the state of affairs of them sitting in the shade eating pomegranates at noon is created.

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[17] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, reprint, (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1977) (Orig. pub. Harper and Row, 1974), 34

[18] Plantinga, 38

[19] Ibid.

[20] Genesis 2:4-17

Rather, this is a state of affairs that Adam and Eve, by their libertarian free choice,[21] have actualized, or caused to be.

Plantinga demonstrates quite clearly that there are states of affairs which exist, which are real, which God does not actualize:

> There are, for example, the state of affairs consisting of God's existence and the state of affairs consisting in His nonexistence. …The theist believes that the first state of affairs is actual…; the atheist believes that the second state of affairs is actual… God has not created either one of them since there never was a time at which either [state of affairs] did not exist.[22]

He then goes on to make the point that states of affairs are not created, but actualized:

> …God did not bring into existence any states of affairs at all. What He did was to perform actions of a certain sort—creating the heavens and earth, for example—which resulted in the actuality of certain states of affairs. God *actualizes* states of affairs.[23] (Italics his)

Now, my illustration of Adam and Eve on their picnic, in addition to Plantinga's existence of God, is a state of affairs which God did not actualize. This of course touches on a philosophical question that is beyond the scope of this presentation: the question of determinism versus free will. If Adam and Eve were hard-wired by God, that is, if they were fully determined by God to have their little picnic, then one might argue that it was God, not Adam and Eve, who actualized the state of affairs of them sitting on the river bank eating pomegranates. I expect that most who happen to read this paper are not determinists, as most people are not, at least not in the ultimate or hard sense that all things are absolutely determined by fate or by God. Rather, most people believe in at least some element of free will, and virtually everyone lives their lives practically as though we have free will. In this paper I am arguing as one who believes in libertarian freedom. As such I find no intellectually satisfying answer to the problem of evil from a hard determinist worldview, so I will not attempt to provide one here. Later I will discuss briefly the problem of evil from a determinist and compatibilist[24] point of view.

Given that man was created with free will, in the libertarian sense, we can see that a host of states of affairs that exist or have existed in the world have been actualized by man, not by God. That my house is setting on the plot of ground upon which it sets is a state of affairs actualized by the contractor and builders who erected it there. They are what we call the *efficient cause* of the state of affairs in which my house sets where it sets.

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[21] Walls, Dongell define a libertarian free action as "…one that does not have a sufficient condition or cause prior to its occurrence." And also: "It also holds that some human actions are free in this sense." Jerry L. Walls, Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not A Calvinist*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004), 103

[22] Plantinga, pp. 38, 39

[23] Plantinga, p. 39

[24] At the risk of oversimplification, compatibilism is a view of free will that says a person acts freely if they act according to their strongest desire or belief. It gets its name from the fact that it is a view of free will that is deemed to be compatible with determinism.

It is true, of course, that God created all things originally and, by extension, He created the contractor and builders who actualized the existence of my house on its plot. As such we refer to God as the ultimate cause. But as the ultimate cause and not the efficient cause, God did not actualize the state of affairs in which my house sets upon its plot of ground.

So, what's the point of all this talk about states of affairs, of actualizing, and of ultimate and efficient causes? Simply this: as I have already shown, evil is not a thing, but rather is a state of affairs. As such it is not created, but rather it is actualized. Further, it was not actualized by God, but was first actualized by Lucifer (Satan), and later also actualized by Adam and Eve.

Before we proceed further then, let's take a moment to review what we've learned so far. In the stories we considered at the beginning of this paper we observed that there are two kinds of evil, moral evil, such as man does to man, and natural evil which is the evil which occurs naturally in the physical world. We have learned that evil is real, but is not a thing or person. We have learned that evil is a state of affairs in which there is either the absence of good or the improper relationship of good things. We have learned that as a state of affairs, it is not proper to speak of evil being created, but rather as being actualized. Finally, we have observed that according to the Bible, God did not actualize evil, but rather it was actualized in God's good creation first by Lucifer and subsequently by Adam and Eve.

THE LOGICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

What should be obvious to the careful reader at this point is that there are a host of important and potentially troubling questions which we have not addressed. For example, while I have shown that God did not actualize evil, I am far from showing that He is "off the hook" for the presence of evil in the world.

Opponents to Christian theism for centuries have raised a serious objection to the Christian doctrine of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God. But this objection has not only been a weapon in the hand of Christianity's opponents, it has often been a major hurdle to the serious enquirer after Christianity, and even a point of faith struggle for many Christians at some point in their lives. It is what is typically referred to as *the problem of evil*. It may also be referred to as the problem of pain, or the problem of suffering.

When we use the phrase *the problem of evil*, we may be using it as a rubric for an entire category of problems associated with explaining the presence of evil in the world or in our lives. We may wish to know how a good God can allow evil generally. Or we may be wondering what the purpose of evil is. On the other hand, we may be struggling with why a particular evil, such as cancer or a debilitating accident, has beset our little child. We may wonder why God permits some evils but prevents others. It is my intention to address these questions at some level in later chapters.

However, as I indicated at the outset, the phrase *the problem of evil*, when used in a theological or philosophical context, generally has a precise reference to what is called the logical problem of evil. It is to this aspect of the problem of evil that I want to direct our thoughts in this chapter.

The Deductive Problem

The logical problem of evil can be divided into two separate problems, the first is the deductive problem, the second is the inductive problem.[25] The essence of the deductive problem of evil is to demonstrate the logical *impossibility* of the Christian God. The essence of the inductive problem of evil is to demonstrate the *improbability* of the Christian God. First, let's consider the deductive problem.

The eighteenth century Scottish philosopher David Hume expressed the problem this way:

> Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?[26]

This is what is often called the logical or intellectual problem of evil. The Christian theist embraces three propositions as true. But the problem is, it is argued, only

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[25] "In a good deductive argument the premises guarantee the truth of their conclusions. In a good inductive argument the premises render the conclusion more probable than its competitors." J. P. Moreland, William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2003), 28

[26] Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, pt. X. Cited in Plantinga, p. 10

two of these propositions can be true, one of them must be false. When it is expressed as a set of propositions it looks like this:

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

It is believed by many, including many Christians, that the Christian doctrine of the omnipotence of God implies that since God is all powerful (*omni*—all, *potent*—*power*), he is capable of doing all things. God himself says to Abraham: "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14) Later, to Jeremiah He says: "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?" (Jeremiah 32:27)

Second, Christians believe that God is all loving and all good or omnibenevolent (*omni*—all, *benevolent*—kind, well meaning). This implies, of course, that God would never desire or wish evil to exist. James says: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God.' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13). The Apostle John says: "God is love" (I John 4:8). The Psalmist declares: "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You" (Psalm 5:4). The prophet Habakkuk confesses: "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor" (Habakkuk 1:13).

Finally, Christians believe (contra pantheism) that evil is real and exists in the world. Scripture is full of the reality of evil. One can say that the entire Bible is addressed to resolving the crisis of evil.

So it appears we have a contradiction. If God were really omnipotent, then obviously he would be powerful enough to eliminate or prevent all evil if he wished to do so. On the other hand, God is all good and would never desire evil or suffering on others. But, alas, evil exists in spades. What are we to conclude? Is God not really omnipotent. Does he really hate evil but is ultimately unable to prevent it? Or, equally troubling, is He omnipotent and powerful enough to prevent evil, but malevolent rather than good, so he approves or condones or desires evil? Or, as the atheist argues, God obviously doesn't exist at all, since He is a logical contradiction.

Theodicy Or Defense?

As an answer to atheists, skeptics, and honest enquirers who say the problem of evil appears to make the existence of the Biblical God a logical impossibility, Christians have traditionally answered with what is called a *theodicy*. The word theodicy signifies a justification of God.

> Such an attempt to specify God's reason for permitting evil is what I earlier called a *theodicy*; in the words of John Milton it is an attempt to "justify the ways of God to man," to show that God is just in permitting evil.[27]

Voluminous pages have been written since the days of Augustine as theodicies to answer the objections of skeptics and the questions of seekers. Plantinga refers to what he

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[27] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, reprint, (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1977) (Orig. pub. Harper and Row, 1974), 27

calls Augustine's Free Will Theodicy. He calls it such "since the idea of rational creatures with free will plays such a prominent role in it."[28]

In spite of all the excellent arguments that Christian divines and theologians had written for centuries offering explanations for why an omnipotent, good God would permit evil, the logical problem of evil persisted. Philosophers still objected that all the theodicies had not provided a refutation of the deductive problem of evil.

In 1974 the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga, then a professor of philosophy at Calvin College and later at Notre Dame, published his definitive work on the problem of evil titled *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Plantinga distinguishes between a theodicy and a defense to the problem of evil, and offers what he calls the Free Will Defense. The defense does not seek to prove what God's reasons for permitting evil actually were, but rather merely that it was logically impossible to create a world with as much good as this one without creating one with the possibility of evil. In other words, a Free Will Defense is less ambitious than a Free Will Theodicy. The theodicy attempts to answer the deductive problem of evil by proving what God's reasons for permitting evil actually are. The Defense, on the other hand, seeks merely to prove that it is logically possible that a good God had sufficiently good reason(s) for permitting evil.

This fine distinction between a theodicy and a defense is not always observed by those addressing the subject of evil. However, for the purposes of clarity in this presentation, I will try to carefully adhere to Plantinga's definition of the terms.

Plantinga's work proved to be a major step forward in the debate on the problem of evil. John Feinberg, professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, says that Plantinga is the Free Will Defense's "ablest defender," and that it "successfully answers the problem of evil that confronts the Arminian theology,"[29] pointing out that many Calvinists also employ this defense. It is generally considered that Plantinga has provided a definitive refutation of the deductive problem of evil. M. L. Mackie, once one of the twentieth century's most articulate proponents of the deductive problem of evil later conceded his previous position "does not, after all, show that the central doctrines of theism are logically inconsistent with one another."[30] The philosopher and former Christian, now atheist, William Rowe says: "Indeed, there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the theistic God."[31] Dr. William Lane Craig, Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology reports:

> I am therefore pleased to report that after long centuries of discussion, the books on the logical version of the problem of suffering have been closed.

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[28] Plantinga, p. 27

[29] John S. Feinberg, "Why I Still Believe In Christ, In Spite of Evil and Suffering," in Norman L. Geisler, Paul K Hoffman, *Why I A Christian*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 2001), 242

[30] M. L. Mackie, Cited by Nash, Ronald H. Nash, "The Problem of Evil," in Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, J. P. Moreland, eds., *To Everyone An Answer*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004), 216

[31] William Rowe, Cited by Nash, Ronald H. Nash, "The Problem of Evil," in Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, J. P. Moreland, eds., *To Everyone An Answer*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004), 216, 217

It's widely admitted by both atheist and Christian philosophers alike that the logical version of the problem of suffering has failed.[32]

Ronald Nash is equally bold in asserting that the problem has been permanently put to rest:

> …no proponent of the deductive problem of evil ever succeeded in supplying the missing proposition needed to reveal the presumed contradiction. Obviously, it is one thing to demonstrate that no one has discovered the required missing premise up to this point. But what about the future? Philosopher Alvin Plantinga has provided a procedure by which Christians can demonstrate the logical consistency of their set of beliefs. This information demonstrates that no philosopher can ever do this in the future.[33]

At the conclusion of his exhaustive and somewhat technical logical argument, Plantinga ends with the following set of propositions:

> God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.
> It was not within God's power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil.
> > *and*
> God created a world containing moral good.
> There is evil.[34]

This has not ended the debate about God, of course, but it has now shifted largely from the deductive problem of evil to the inductive or "probabilistic" problem of evil.

The fact that the Free Will Defense has been so effective in answering the deductive problem of evil does not mean that there is no place for theodicy. Theodicies can be tremendously helpful, particularly in addressing the probabilistic or inductive problem of evil, as well as answering the universal yearning of man to understand the purpose or reason for the existence of evil.

The Omnipotence of God

So, let's explore some of the points in the Free Will Defense. The apparent contradiction in Christian belief exploited by the deductive problem of evil lies in a common misunderstanding of the omnipotence of God. The omnipotence of God is defined by the theologian Charles Ryrie as meaning "…God is all-powerful and able to do anything *consistent with His own nature*."[35] (Italics mine.) Discussing God's omnipotence, L. Berkhof says in his Systematic Theology:

> But on the other hand [the Bible] also indicates there are many things which God cannot do. He can neither lie, sin, change, nor deny Himself, Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29; II Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:18; Jas. 1:13, 17. There is no absolute power in Him that is divorced from His perfections, and in

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[32] William Lane Craig, *On Guard*, (Colo. Sprgs., CO, David C. Cook),157

[33] Nash, 215

[34] Plantinga, p. 54

[35] Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1986, 1999), p. 45

virtue of which He can do all kinds of things which are inherently contradictory.[36]

Most Christian theologians, like Berkhof and Ryrie, hold that the Scriptures are clear that the omnipotence of God does not involve the ability of God to do logically contradictory things, including those things which contradict his essential nature. Hence, as Berkhof points out, God cannot lie. Other things God cannot logically do are to make a square circle or to make someone freely choose to do something. These things are by definition logically impossible. If one says that God can do logically impossible things, then all of Christian doctrine is a silly mishmash. Nothing that Scripture says can be given any weight because everything it says can be true and false at the same time.

Why do we place such a strong emphasis on logic? Because logic is not a human invention. Logic is truth, and God is truth. Everything about God is essentially logical. If God is illogical, then He ceases to be God. Hence, it is impossible for God to do logically contradictory things.

Returning, then, to the deductive version of the problem of evil, when an opponent asserts in his first premise that the Christian says God is omnipotent, it is important that he or she acknowledge that we do not believe that God's omnipotence entails the ability to do logically contradictory things. The significance of this distinction will become apparent shortly.

Morally Good Creatures and Freedom

At the core of the Christian belief about creation is that God set about to create a immeasurably and perfectly good world. The height of that immeasurably good creation was the creation of human beings, made in the likeness of God, who would love Him and enjoy His love, and who would be true moral creatures. The magnificence of God's creation included His desire and ability to create creatures who were not merely good in the sense of their physical and mental attributes, but morally good as well.

However, as Feinberg points out, one cannot be a truly moral creature, one who is responsible for the good which he or she actualizes, without freedom. As he asserts:

> …the theist appeals to a commonly held moral principle: No one can be held morally accountable for failing to do what they couldn't do or for doing what they couldn't fail to do. That is, moral praise or blame can be correctly assessed only to someone who acts freely.[37]

So from the point of morally significant creatures, we discover the absolute necessity of free will. If God created humans (or angels, for that matter) who could only do good, only do the things which were in accord with God's holiness, then they would not be true moral creations. They might be in some sense automatons or robots, programmed to do only good, but they could not be truly moral creatures acting out truly significantly moral actions. To be truly moral creatures they must have true freedom.

On another front, we discover again the necessity of free will. God's intention for humankind is that we would enjoy a love relationship with him. However, love is not

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[36] L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI., Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1939, 1941, Reprinted Oct. 1984), 80

[37] Feinberg, 240

possible where free choice does not exist. If I possessed absolute deterministic control over my wife, and if every gesture we normally associate with love was in fact something that I required her to perform, and if she had no choice whatsoever but deterministically carried out those actions towards me, then love would not be causing her actions, but they would be caused by my will. Further, if I so controled my wife's actions, and did in fact determine her to tell me repeatedly that she loved me, to tell me what a great person I was, and to kiss me goodbye every morning, I would not be a loving husband, but rather a pathetic narcissist.

So then, we discover the necessity, if God were to create creatures who were to enjoy the ultimate good of loving and being loved by God, of those creatures having genuine free will.

The Nature of Freedom

What does such freedom entail? Put succinctly, such freedom is "the ability to be the efficient cause of one's own moral actions. Acts of which one is not the efficient cause, but rather which are forced, are not free moral acts."[38]

Geisler and Brooks elaborate:

> Some have said that [free will] refers to the ability to *desire*. But a better definition is that it is the ability to *decide*. Desire is a passion, an emotion; but will is a choice between two or more desires. Also, some think that to be free means that there can be no limitation of alternatives—one must be able to do whatever he wants. But the opposite of freedom is not fewer alternatives, it is being forced to choose one thing and not another. Freedom is not in *unlimited options*, but in *unfettered choice* between whatever options there are. …Free will means the ability to make an **unforced decision** between two or more alternatives.[39] (All emphases theirs.)

The freedom that is necessary for an individual to be significantly morally free, then, is their ability to be the sole efficient cause of their choice between two or more real alternatives. Any external cause which restricts one's capability to choose between two alternatives renders one of those alternatives unreal or nonexistent, and thereby eliminates true freedom.

In other words, for a person's action to be morally significant, it is imperative that such a person be the sole cause of her choice between two alternatives (A or not A). This is not to say that outside factors do not influence an individual's desires, but that in the end, that individual makes a choice between A and not A where both A and not A are real possibilities for him or her to choose.

This is best illustrated by the example of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Prior to his eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam had no experience with evil. He had no knowledge of it. He had no inner sin nature. Yet Adam made a free, unfettered choice to disobey God's command not to eat of the fruit. He had been given a real choice when God gave the

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[38] Norman L. Geisler, "The Origin of Sin," vol. 3, *Systematic Theology*, (Bloomington, MN, Bethany House Pub., 2004), 86

[39] Norman L. Geisler, Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1990), 63

command not to eat of the fruit of that particular tree. God had not prohibited Adam from eating of that particular fruit because there was some magic or power in the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Rather God gave the command in order that Adam might have true libertarian moral freedom. It other words, what made that particular tree the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was not some poison or potion in the juices of the fruit, but rather the command of God itself.

Further, it was not necessary for Adam to eat of the fruit to possess knowledge of good and evil. He merely needed to be given the alternative to eat or not to eat in a moral sense. Once the alternative to eat or not eat was set before him, and was imbued with moral significance, whatever choice Adam made would result in a knowledge of good and evil. As it was, Adam's choice meant that he came to know evil in an experiential sense that was never God's desire. Had he chosen not to eat, he would have gained a knowledge similar (but not identical) to God's knowledge of good and evil.

But the question that has dogged believers for millennia is, why did Adam sin? Often Christians spend considerable time speculating on what caused Adam to sin. Such a query misses the point of moral freedom and moral responsibility. Nothing else caused Adam to sin. He could not say, "The devil made me do it." He could not say, "Eve made me do it." (Though he tried.) Adam caused Adam to sin. Adam was the first cause of his own sin. Such is the nature of true moral freedom and moral accountability.

Let's take a moment to review of some of the things we've learned. We have discovered that there is what is called a deductive problem of evil which asserts that it is logically impossible for there to be an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God and to also have evil in the world. However, that charge has been definitively answered by the so called Free Will Defense (FWD). The FWD shows that God's omnipotence does not entail that God can do logically impossible things. Further, it relies upon the fact that in creating the good world that He chose to create, God chose to create morally free creatures. This requires that His creatures have the true ability to be the sole efficient cause of their choice to do or not do morally significant actions. For this to occur, God imbued a choice regarding the eating of the fruit of a particular tree with moral significance. He did so by giving a command that it not be eaten, while continuing to leave Adam and Eve with the real ability to be the sole efficient cause of their eating or not eating.

God's Choice

This leads us then to some important conclusions. If it was God's desire to create a good world, filled with millions or billions of creatures who enjoyed a love relationship with Him, and who, like Him, possessed a moral dimension, then it was logically necessary that such creatures have moral freedom. However, moral freedom is not moral if the choices available have no moral dimension to them. Neither are they moral if there is no real alternative. One is not accountable for doing what they can only do, or not doing what they cannot do. (see Feinberg quote on p. 16) Neither are they free if the action is caused by something or someone external to the individual.

Thus, God was faced with the following alternatives. He could either create beings who were morally free and who could love Him and one another, and thus possessed the potential to do evil. Secondly, He could create beings who could never do evil, but were not free. Third, He could have not created at all. (I will discuss this third option in the next section.) To create beings who were not free would entail creating

beings who could do no moral good, nor could they love God or one another. It is important to acknowledge that it was *logically impossible* to create creatures who were both morally free and could never do evil. And although God is omnipotent, He cannot do those things which are logically impossible. God could no more create beings who were morally free, yet must of necessity always do moral good, than He could cease to exist, or sin, or lie, or deny Himself.

Simply put, God could not create morally free persons and make them always choose to do good. If they were to be morally free, then they must have the capability to do evil. God's other choice was to not create morally free people, but to do so He would have forfeited the immeasurable good of having billions of people doing good and enjoying a love relationship with Him and with one another. God's choice was the former rather than the latter.

Now, someone might protest that God should have opted for some other alternative than to create morally free beings who could choose to do evil, even though creating such beings is admittedly a good thing in itself. Yet every day, all over the world, men and women are making precisely the same kind of decision. They are choosing to "make" other morally significant beings with free will. We call them babies (who grow up to be teenagers, then adults). Parents exult in the creation of babies. They celebrate it. They believe, generally, that is it a good thing. Yet there is no guarantee that these morally free agents will not do much evil. We know that is a possibility, even a likelihood, yet we decide to make babies anyway. Even if they do not go horribly wrong, we know and fully expect that they will do many wrong things in life. They will lie. They will be lazy. They will say nasty things to us and to others. They will have destructive car accidents. They may marry the wrong person, or they may get divorced. All of these things are real possibilities, some of them virtual certainties. Nevertheless, we as parents, consider that the good of bringing such creatures into the world far outweighs the evil we know and expect will occur. Of course, if we are responsible parents, we have a plan in place for coping with such evils, and hopefully overcoming them. We call that love and discipline. The parallel with God is obvious. He has made a similar decision to create morally free persons who will (He knows) do much evil. However, even more than we, God has a plan in place for dealing with such evil. He calls it love, discipline, and redemption.

The important thing to recognize in all of this argument is that the deductive problem of evil has been answered. It is *not* logically impossible to have an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God coincide with the existence of evil.

Throughout this discussion I have focused chiefly on only one of the two kinds of evil—moral evil. This still leaves the question of natural evil inadequately addressed. Since natural evil raises its own sort of questions, I will address them in a later chapter.

Some Objections

Some have protested against this argument, that since God is omnipotent, he could have created free moral creatures who nevertheless always chose good. Such an objection misses the point of the FWD, which is that God's omnipotence does not entail doing the logically impossible. For God to make morally free creatures do something is logically impossible.

Another objection is that God could have not created morally free creatures. Then His world would have been wholly good. While it is true that such a world could have been wholly good, this objection does not prove that such a world would have contained more good than the present world contains with its billions of free moral creatures. In other words, given the immeasurable goodness of morally free creatures doing good and loving God, such a world, though containing some evil, may easily be far better than a world without such creatures which has no evil

Here is an illustration. Most readers of this paper likely possess an automobile. In their world they have made the choice to possess an automobile. Now most of us consider possessing an automobile to be a good thing. It affords us the ability to move quickly over long distances in relative comfort and out of the elements. We are able to listen to beautiful music as we travel. We can carry large amounts of material with us in the trunk. But automobiles are also a cause of evil. They require the expenditure of considerable amounts of hard earned money to buy and to fill with fuel. Their complex mechanical systems tend to break down, often at highly inconvenient times, causing us to miss important appointments, or spend exorbitant amounts of money to repair. Some breakdowns actually imperil lives. Given the high-speed travel they afford, they are actually prone to be the cause of serious injury and death.

So, given all the evil that automobiles introduce into our lives, why do we own them? We do so because we believe the remarkable amount of good that automobiles afford us far outweighs the evil that comes with possessing them. So clearly, we do not really believe that it is always best to take the route of no evil. In many choices we make in our lives, we deem a very great good to outweigh some significant evil. Sometimes when making decisions in our lives we draw up a chart of pros and cons. If the pros far outweigh the cons, we take that as justification to take a particular course of action. The same can be said of God. Though creating morally free creatures introduced the potential of evil in his creation, the immeasurable good of having morally free creatures far outweighed the evil.

The Inductive (Probabilistic) Problem

So far we've made a lot of progress, but our work is far from over. Someone can say: "Okay, you've shown that it isn't impossible for there to be a Christian God, but it is still improbable, given the overwhelming amount of evil, and the apparent gratuitous nature of evil that does exist. Sure, I can accept that God had to make people free to make moral choices, but the overwhelming amount of evil that has resulted makes it highly improbable that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God exists. This is what we call the inductive or probabilistic problem of evil. Plantinga says it this way:

> Another possibility is that the existence of evil, or of the amount of it we find (perhaps coupled with other things we know) makes it *unlikely or improbable* that God exists. And, of course, this could be true even if the existence of God is consistent with that of evil.[40] (Emphasis his.)

The philosophers James Cornman and Keith Lehrer, writing in the last century, asserted:

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[40] Plantinga, 59

> If you were all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful…what kind of world would you create? …Obviously you would choose the best of all possible worlds because you would be all good and would want to do what is best in everything you do. …Try to imagine what such a world would look like. Would it be like the one that actually does exist, this world we live in? Would you create a world such as this one if you had the power and knowhow to create any logically possible world? If your answer is "no," as it seems it must be, then you should begin to understand why the evil of suffering and pain in this world is such a problem for anyone who thinks God created this world; then, it seems we should conclude that it is improbable that it was created or sustained by anything we would call God. Thus, given this particular world, it seems we should conclude that it is improbable that God–who, if he exists, created the world–exists.[41]

So, the inductive or probabilistic problem argues that the kinds and amount of evil we witness in the world, though not proving conclusively that it is impossible for God to exist, makes it so highly improbable that one is forced to conclude that He does not.

Best Of All Possible Worlds?

Earlier, I discussed at length how Plantinga's Free Will Defense is widely considered to have answered the deductive problem of evil. The fact is, however, that he has also employed the FWD to answer the inductive problem of evil with equal success.

The crux of the probabilistic problem of evil is that the God described in the Bible would have created the best of all possible worlds, and the amount and kinds of evil in this world show that it is not the best of all possible worlds, therefore such a God does not exist. This is what Cornman and Lehrer stated in the above quote.

What Plantinga has shown in the FWD is that the assumption made by Cornman an Lehrer is, in fact, erroneous. The probabilistic problem of evil asserts that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God could and would have chosen to create the "best of all possible worlds." But Plantinga shows, in a very involved logical presentation, that such an assumption is in error. The idea that God could create the best of all possible worlds is one put forward by the renowned eighteenth century German philosopher G. W. Liebniz. However, the FWD shows Leibniz' assumption false, and Plantinga refers to this as "Leibniz' Lapse."[42] At the close of his argument regarding Leibniz' Lapse, Plantinga concludes:

> The Free Will Defender, you recall, insists on the possibility that it is not within God's power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil. …The atheologian is right in holding that there are many possible worlds containing moral good but no moral evil; his mistake lies in endorsing Leibniz' Lapse. So one of his

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[41] James Cornman, Keith Lehrer, *Philosophical Problems and Arguments*, (New York, Macmillan Co., 1969), 340-349, cited in Plantinga, 60
[42] Plantinga, 34-44

premises—that God, if omnipotent, could have actualized just any world He pleased—is false.[43]

Later Plantinga returns to this theme when addressing the subject of the probabilistic problem of evil.

> The first premise of this argument [that God could create the best of all possible worlds] is another statement of Leibniz' Lapse; and we have already seen that the latter is false. It isn't true that God, if omnipotent, could have actualized just any possible world. …furthermore, [the inference] seems to presuppose that there *is* such a thing as the best of all possible worlds: and we have already seen that this supposition is suspect. Just as there is no greatest prime number, so perhaps there is no best of all possible worlds. Perhaps for any world you mention, replete with dancing girls and deliriously happy sentient creatures, there is an even better world, containing even more dancing girls and deliriously happy sentient creatures. If so, it seems reasonable to think that the second possible world is better than the first. But then it follows that for any possible world W there is a better world W', in which case there just isn't any such thing as the best of all possible worlds.[44] (Emphasis his.)

In concluding his argument of the problem of evil, Plantinga says:

> The upshot, I believe, is that there is no good atheological argument from evil. The existence of God is neither precluded or rendered improbable by the existence of evil. Of course, suffering and misfortune may nonetheless constitute a *problem* for the theist; but the problem is not that his beliefs are logically or probabilistically incompatible. …The Free Will Defense, however, shows that the existence of God is compatible, both logically and probabilistically, with the existence of evil; thus it solves the main philosophical problem of evil.[45]

Other Approaches To The Probabilistic Problem —Our Limited Perspective

The reader may be saying at this point, "Come again." Plantinga's arguments do at times seem to be a bit challenging for the average non-philosopher to follow. So let's back off a bit and look at the probabilistic problem from some other angles.

The probabilistic problem of evil is a bit more formidable for the Christian to answer precisely because it is, in fact, a more modest assertion, and therefore calls for a lower burden of proof on the part of the atheist. He does not have to prove that God is impossible, but merely that He is improbable.[46]

So the question the believer must address is whether or not the amount and kind of evil in the world is such that it is improbable that a good and omnipotent God would

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[43] Plantinga, 44
[44] Plantinga, 61
[45] Plantinga, 63
[46] Craig, 158

ever create such a world. As it turns out, that although the atheist has a much more modest threshold to meet than in the deductive problem, he still is unable to meet it.

In the first place, it is a bit of hubris to assert that we finite and temporally bound minds have a sufficient grasp of all reality to be able to assess how much evil is too much evil, and what evil is gratuitous as opposed to "legitimate." For example, most readers of this paper can probably relate to the following phenomenon. At some point in life we encounter some extremely difficult situation that causes all measure of consternation, worry, and sometimes even emotional or physical suffering. At the time it seems all pointless, with no redeeming aspects whatsoever. But as time passes, and the particular difficulty recedes into the past, we develop more perspective. We find that we are more understanding of others, have a greater level of perseverance, are perhaps equipped in some ways to accomplish things in life we would not otherwise have been able to accomplish. Eventually, we come to realize that the evil that we experienced has actually resulted in a comparatively far greater good.

If we, with our finite minds, bound to the present with no knowledge of the future, are able to see this phenomenon at work, how much more is the omniscient God, who is "outside" of time, able to perceive good reasons for permitting evil which we limited creatures are unable to see? So it is, as I suggested, a bit of hubris for us to declare that we know that the amount and kind of evil in the world is excessive to what a truly good and omnipotent God would allow.

As William Lane Craig points out:

> The key to the evidential argument is the atheist's claim that God doesn't have good reasons for permitting the suffering that occurs. …My first point is that we're just not in a position to make that kind of judgment with confidence.[47]

Nash argues it this way:

> …what properties must a being possess in order to know that some evils really are gratuitous? It certainly appears as though one such property must be omniscience. It would seem then that the only kind of being who could know whether some gratuitous evils exist would be God. But if the only being who could know whether such evils exist is God, there surely are problems in arguing that the existence of gratuitous evils are a defeater for the existence of God.[48]

—Probable with respect to what?

When someone asserts that the existence of the amount and kind of evil in the world renders the existence of God improbable, then the Christian must logically ask: "Improbable with respect to what?" To determine probabilities, one must possess a sufficient amount of background information.

As Moreland and Craig point out:

> If the logical version of the internal problem of evil were a sound argument, then God would not exist, case closed. But probabilities are

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[47] Craig, 158
[48] Nash, 220

relative to one's background information. Thus, with a probability argument, we have to ask: probable with respect to what?[49]

For example, one might say Alex is a student. Suppose one third of one percent of all students ever become doctors. Then someone might say that it is highly improbable that Alex will become a doctor. But we are ignoring all kinds of background information, such as what kind of student Alex is. Is he an average student, or is he an exceptionally gifted student? We are also ignoring whether Alex is an elementary school student or a freshman pre-med college student, or even a third year med-school student. Obviously, that kind of information has considerable bearing on the probability of Alex becoming a doctor. Once we enter in all the background information that Alex is an exceptionally gifted third year med-school student, the probabilities are decidedly shifted in his favor.

When someone argues that the amount and kind of evil present in the world makes it improbable that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God exists, they are not factoring in all the background information. One of the significant pieces of information that is being ignored is the amount of good in the world. Does the amount of evil in the world so outweigh the good that it renders God improbable? What about the exquisite pleasure of love? What of the good friends that most people have? What of the stunning beauty that surrounds us? What about the stimulating ideas that engage our minds? What about the pleasure of a good's night sleep?

A strong argument can be made that the vast majority of the population of the world does not concur that the evil of this world far outweighs the good. How do we know this? Simply by recognizing that only a small fraction of people ever commit suicide, even in cultures where it is not stigmatized as it is in the West. For example, in Japan, which tragically has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, it still accounts for less than two percent of the population that are likely to commit suicide in their lifetime.

While there are a host of motivations for suicide, probably the essential element in most is that a person's individual life has become so unbearable, so full of evil, that it outweighs the perceived potential for good and the value of remaining alive.

If the atheist's argument is so clearly true that the evil in this world outweighs the good, then one would expect that the majority of people in the world would seriously contemplate suicide. But in fact we find just the opposite, even among many people who are suffering in significant ways. The instinct of man is to live, and most people will do whatever it takes within their power to stay alive, even most people crippled with debilitating handicaps, facing unspeakable grief, or encountering deep loss. And of course, many of those who do encounter such suffering and do contemplate suicide, eventually move past that point and rediscover that there is much good in this world yet to experience and worth sticking around to enjoy.

So, while there is much evil in the world, when we add only the background information of the known good, we find that in the judgment of most, the good outweighs the bad. But we are not even able to perceive all the good that is to come. We are finite and have almost no comprehension of the scale of the good that will exist throughout all

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[49] J. P. Moreland, William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2003), 542

eternity. That is simply beyond our ability to know. So we simply are in no place to judge that the amount of evil present in the world makes the existence of God improbable.

But there is also other background information that has a bearing of the question of the probability of God's existence. There are the cosmological, the teleological, and the ontological evidences for the existence of God as well, which must be factored into the question.

If one is permitted to only consider the evil in the world when factoring the probability of God, then it is not surprising that one would conclude that it is highly improbable that God exists. But to so exclude all the other data, the immeasurable amount of good, the cosmological evidence, the teleological evidence, and the ontological evidence, is to skew the data and therefore to distort the outcome.

Let's again take a moment to review the things we've just discussed about the inductive (probabilistic) problem of evil. We have observed that the FWD has shown that one of the inductive problem's primary assumptions–that if God existed He would have created the "best of all possible worlds"–is logically flawed. We have learned that as human beings we are simply not in a place to be able to know whether God had sufficiently good reasons to permit the amount and kinds of evil we see in the world, though our experiential evidence suggests it is likely he does. Finally, we have learned that the proposition of the inductive problem of evil fails to take in all the background data necessary to decide the question. Christians believe that when all that background data is considered, the weight of the evidence shifts decidedly in favor of the probability of God's existence.

Alternative Christian Answers

While the Free Will Defense (FWD) which I have described at length has provided a definitive coherent answer to the logical problem of evil, not all Christians adhere to a basic premise of the FWD: the premise of libertarian free will. Falling into this category, of course, are Christians who hold to Calvinistic concepts of God's sovereignty. It must be recognized that Calvinism is not a monolithic theology. There is a wide spectrum of views on a host of issues within the general framework of Calvinism. For purposes of this discussion I will speak in terms of *hard* and *soft* Calvinism (or determinism). By hard Calvinism I mean no pejorative connotation, but simply that, as I use the term, someone towards the hard end of the Calvinist spectrum holds to a very strong determinist view of God's sovereignty. On the other hand, a soft Calvinist towards the other end of the spectrum would be one who holds to a view of some element of human free will.[50] Typically, that view of free will is what is called *compatibilist* free will. That would be a view of free will that is believed to be compatible with the deterministic aspects of Calvinism's view of God's sovereignty.

Of course, Calvinism, in all of its expressions, also seeks to answer the problem of evil. As I indicated earlier, in his explanation of the FWD, the Calvinist John Feinberg says that many Calvinists also hold to the FWD.[51] Presumably, such Calvinists are

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[50] Jerry L. Walls, Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not A Calvinist*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004) 102-103, 107-110

[51] Feinberg, p. 242

adherents to a compatibilist view of free will, though the FWD is best understood from a view of libertarian free will.

A Calvinist Theodicy

So, how does a "hard" Calvinist, one who holds to a very strong determinist view of God's sovereignty, attempt to answer the problem of evil? Let's recall first what the logical problem of evil asserts. It argues that there is a logical impossibility or high improbability in the existence of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God who permits the existence of evil. In the FWD it is argued that the omnipotence of God does not entail the possibility of God doing the logically impossible. Thus, God cannot make morally free men who always choose to do good, because to do so is a logical impossibility, which even an omnipotent God cannot do.

However, the hard Calvinist does not hold to the view that men have true moral free will. So even though he does believe, as most do, that an omnipotent God cannot do the logically impossible, this provides him no help, since he believes that God has sovereignly predetermined all that will happen and that man's free will is merely a human illusion.

This appears to back such a Calvinist into a corner. His view of God's sovereignty and human free will appears to lead inexorably to the conclusion that God, at a minimum, somehow wanted, desired, or willed evil to occur. This appears to fall directly into the trap of the logical problem of evil. The Calvinist insists on the moral goodness of God, yet this God somehow wanted or desired evil. This is the very dichotomy that the problem of evil asserts proves such a God does not exist.

In answer to this, the Calvinist seeks to provide a theodicy which accounts for the apparent discrepancy of saying that God is all good, yet He has desired, willed, or decreed evil to exist. Typically, this theodicy centers on God's desire to display His glory through His triumph over evil.

For example, we have the words of Calvinist John Piper, in a widely available and emotionally powerful video entitled "Why Is There Evil In The World?"

> The terrorized, troubled world exists to make a place for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to suffer and die for our sins. The reason there is terror in the world is so that Christ could be terrorized. The reason there is trouble in the world is so that Christ could be troubled. The reason there is pain in the universe is so that Christ could feel pain. This is the world that God prepared for the suffering and death of His Son. This is the world where the best display of divine love could happen. … This world of suffering and death exists so that God could love like He only could love in this world. And you can back up and say, "I wouldn't have done it that way." Well, you're not God, and I am thankful. I think it's really arrogant to say that you, before the creation of the universe, would have greater wisdom than the Almighty, to design a universe in which the fullness of the panorama of His perfections would shine more brightly than in this one. [52]

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[52] John Piper, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGhCWh4Gbso (Last accessed on 9/17/12).

What Piper appears to be arguing is that it was God's desire, His preference if you will, that the world be full of terror and trouble in order to demonstrate the "fullness of the panorama of His perfections." So, to carry out that preference, God decreed evil to exist. Other Calvinist writings make it clear that it was God's pleasure to predetermine the vast majority of mankind to the terrors and pain of everlasting hell.[53] To be fair, all Calvinists dogmatically insist on the absolute moral perfection of God, that He is only good and is not morally culpable for evil. But that is precisely the problem of evil. The problem of evil asserts that God cannot be omnibenevolent and permit, let alone prefer, evil to exist. The hard Calvinist makes no attempt to explain how this can be, merely that it is how it is.

It should be noted that Piper's remarks, which fit well within orthodox Calvinism, constitute a theodicy rather than a defense. Remember that a theodicy seeks to explain *why* God permits (or in the Calvinist view, wills and decrees) evil. In other words, a Calvinist theodicy for the problem of evil does not demonstrate the logical error of the problem of evil, but rather asserts that a good and righteous God has justifiable reasons to will, to desire, and to bring evil into existence. The reason is in order that He might demonstrate the "full panorama of His perfections."

This, of course, does not really answer the inductive problem of evil. There is no explanation given as to how God can be both holy and loving, yet intentionally predetermine men to sin. The Calvinist argues that the Scripture asserts both the righteous and loving God, and the God who determines beforehand for men to sin. They make no apology for the apparent contradiction, but insist that it is the teaching of Scripture and, as such, must be accepted and believed. So, as we see, such Calvinists offer a theodicy for the problem of evil, but one that leaves the apparent glaring contradiction of the problem intact. This may explain the persistence of the logical problem of evil as an objection among philosophers for centuries until the development of an articulate and precise expression of the FWD.

The Humans Defense

As we move along the Calvinist spectrum towards a "softer" Calvinism, we encounter a more conscientious effort to provide a substantive answer to the problem of evil which goes further than a theodicy. An example of such a Calvinist is John Feinberg, professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, a

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[53] Ronnie W. Rogers, *Reflections of a Disenchanted Calvinist*, (Bloomington, IN, Crossbooks, A Division of LifeWay, 2012) 12-15.
See also: John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter 21, Sect. 7 "We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all… those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction. …while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment." http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/books/institutes/ (Last accessed 9/30/12). See also: *Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646*, Chp. III, Art. VII; "The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extends or withholds mercy, as He pleases, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice."

renowned evangelical Calvinist institution. Feinberg has devoted much of his attention in his adult life to the study of the problem of evil.[54]

Feinberg clearly has a great respect for the FWD, and particularly for Alvin Plantinga's presentation of it. As I pointed out earlier, Feinberg notes that many Calvinists have invoked the FWD, though he acknowledges that "its notion of free will doesn't fit Calvinistic systems committed to a strong sense of divine sovereignty."[55]

Feinberg seems to be unsatisfied with not providing a better answer to the problem of evil than we discussed in the previous section on Calvinist theodicy. Whether or not that is the case, he does put forward a defense that goes decidedly beyond a theodicy and seeks to provide a tight rebuttal to the problem of evil. He refers to this as the Humans Defense (alluding to the nature of what it means to be human).

What the Humans Defense (HD) provides for the Calvinist is a defense that does not rest on libertarian freedom, as does the FWD, but rather includes the concept of compatibilist freedom which many Calvinists find more "compatible" to their view of divine sovereignty. Unlike the FWD, however, Feinberg's HD, does not make the matter of free will, either compatibilist or libertarian, central to its argument.

What is central to the Humans Defense are the features of the human creature God intended to make when He created him. The HD, according to Feinberg, asserts that such a creature is good and is part of God's perfectly good creation.

> I begin by asking what sort of beings God intended to create when he made humans. Here I am referring to the basic abilities and capacities God gave human beings. At a minimum, I believe he intends to create beings with the ability to reason, with emotions, with wills that are compatibilistically free (although freedom isn't the emphasis of this defense), with desires, with intentions, and with the capacity for bodily movement.[56]

Feinberg goes on to address the subject of moral evil within his HD, saying:

> Moral evil is not something God created. …Hence we cannot say God intended for moral evil to exist. God intended to create and did create agents who can act; he didn't create their acts (good or evil).[57]

Feinberg then lays out a list of reasons why God, who is perfectly good, must allow evil to exist. His arguments consist of demonstrating that in order to prevent evil God would have to, in some way, cause man to be different and less than the good creation he intended to make.

> It is my contention that if God did what is necessary to remove moral evil from the world, he would (1) contradict his intentions to create human beings and the world as he has, causing us to wonder if he has one or more of the attributes ascribed to him, and/or (2) do something we would not

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[54] Feinberg, 237

[55] Feinberg, 242

[56] Feinberg, 244

[57] Feinberg, 245

expect or want him to do, because it would produce greater evil than there already is.[58]

Feinberg's list of reasons are in large measure helpful observations as to why God cannot remove evil from the world without creating some contradiction to his original intention. He explains why God cannot simply make his compatibilistically free creatures to have only desires for good, pointing out how massively God would have to rearrange all creation to accomplish this. He clarifies why God could not simply make creatures who would be unable to do evil. As he shows, this would contradict God's purpose in making the good creatures He did. At several points there are parallels to the FWD.

However, in examining the HD, a couple of aspects call for thoughtful critique. First, it is important to recognize that as a compatibilist, Feinberg's definition of free will appears to exhibit the weakness which was discussed earlier in a citation from Geisler/Brooks. Feinberg specifically places the primary source of evil in the person's desire, as opposed to the choice. "I hold that morally evil actions stem from human desire."[59] In doing so he references the epistle of James (1:13-15), in which James writes about the process of lust (evil desire) proceeding ultimately to death. Problematically, James is not speaking about the source of evil, but rather the source of temptation, which is our evil desires. Feinberg's explanation for the source of evil appears to overlook the matter of choice, which is, of course, the central issue in free will, as Geisler/Brooks point out: "Free will means the ability to make an **unforced decision** between two or more alternatives."[60] (emphasis theirs)

One reason this fine point is problematic is because it fails to explain the source of original sin (Adam's). While Feinberg does acknowledge that Adam "in ideal surroundings and circumstances sinned," what isn't clear is how Adam could be so influenced by desires to do evil.[61] From whence came such desires? Adam knew nothing of good and evil (that was the point of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil). He possessed no sin nature.

The core of compatibilist free will is the "compatibility" with determinism. There is no point in holding to compatibilism unless one wishes to maintain that God is somehow determining the outcome of a person's "free" choice. Thus compatibilism holds that men act freely based on their strongest desire. This free act, in order to be compatible with divine determinism, must be prompted by the strongest desire, and that desire has a determining source. Herein lies the great difficulty with a compatibilist view: how could Adam act to sin based on his strong desire to do so and that desire not originate from God? If one argues that it came from Satan, the problem has not been eliminated, it has only been moved back one step.

Now clearly Feinberg asserts that God did not desire evil, and he is to be commended for wishing to preserve a view of God's moral perfection clearly taught in Scripture. But it is difficult to see how his assertion holds up in view of his position on compatibilism and his view that freedom is acting on one's strongest desire, rather than an unforced decision between two or more alternatives.

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[58] Feinberg, 246

[59] Feinberg, 245

[60] Geisler, Brooks, 63

[61] Feinberg, p. 246

At the conclusion of his presentation of the HD, Feinberg states: "Hence, I have solved my theology's [Calvinism's] logical problem of moral evil."[62] However, it is not clear exactly how he has done so. While he has provided a number of reasons why God could not remove evil (a worthy theodicy), he doesn't really account for the origin of evil, or explain how his compatibilism does not, in the end, have God in some measure desiring and even facilitating evil by placing in Adam (and/or Satan) desires He knew and wanted to lead inexorably to evil. So, it appears that the basic contradiction pointed out in the problem of evil remains unanswered by the Humans Defense.

Therefore, for a definitive defense to the logical problem of evil, we are left with the Free Will Defense, a defense which has demonstrated itself to be remarkably robust and satisfactory.

A Purpose For Evil?

I have argued so far that it is possible that God has sufficient reasons for permitting evil, though such reasons may be beyond our knowledge. Nevertheless, we do have good cause to believe that God does, in fact, have such sufficient reasons. What could possibly be the reasons a good and loving God would allow his creatures to experience evil, pain, and suffering?

Of course, the first answer as to why God permits evil lies in the purpose of God to create moral creatures. For man to be a moral creature, it was necessary that he possess free will, as I have shown. So, man must be free to act contrary to what is good and right. If God were to determine man not to act contrary to His will, such men would not be free, and they would not be moral. In doing so God would eliminate the immeasurable good of having moral creatures in His creation.

However, one thing is clear as one reads through the Bible. God does sometimes act to prevent evil from occurring. Consider the account of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those cities had descended to the abyss of evil. When God sent his angels to determine the extent of the cities' wickedness, they were nearly assaulted by a perverse mob seeking to engage them in homosexual sin. As the mob pressed against Lot's door, the angels struck them with blindness, preventing a great evil from occurring.

Or, consider the Children of Israel as they were backed up between the Red Sea and the approaching Egyptian army, which was bent on the utter destruction of the Israelites. God opened the Red Sea for them as an escape route, then drowned the Egyptian soldiers and Pharaoh himself. In this manner God prevented the great evil of the annihilation of the descendants of Abraham.

We could go on for hours recounting one time after another when God acted, often miraculously, to prevent evil that otherwise seemed certain to transpire. This leads, of course, to the obvious question as to why God chooses to prevent some evils, yet clearly allows other evils to proceed. In other words, in any specific case of evil, why does God permit it? Is He capricious and arbitrary, or does He have some high purpose or reason for permitting some, indeed, what seems to be most, evil to occur?

In the first place, it is important to note that much suffering we experience we bring upon ourselves. It is simply the inevitable consequence of the wrong choices we make. God has established an order in His creation in which evil actions have

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[62] Feinberg, p. 249

consequences. He first warned Adam in the Garden that the day he ate of the tree, he would "surely die." God is not obliged to protect us from the consequences of the evil we bring upon ourselves. The woman who smokes heavily for years, though she knows such habits are life threatening, can hardly blame God when the emphysema or lung cancer sets in and slowly, painfully, eats away her life. The man who repeatedly cheats on his wife need not expect that God will shield him from the breakup of his marriage and the anger and rejection he experiences from his children. The young person who drives recklessly at high speeds, endangering the lives of others, should not be surprised to find himself paralyzed from the neck down for the rest of his life.

These are "natural" consequences of the evil we engage in. What is surprising is not that our chickens come home to roost, but that they don't do so with more frequency than they do. That is likely an evidence of the mercy of God. But when we do experience evil from such choices, God is permitting the inevitable consequences of our decisions to get our attention and remind us that sin is sin. If God were to always intervene to remove the consequences of our bad choices, we would have a dramatically diminished incentive to avoid such choices. Even when Adam and Eve were without a sin nature, God used the possibility of the experience of evil to attempt to dissuade them from eating the forbidden fruit.

But, of course, for each example just listed, there is the other side of the story. There are the innocent victims. The children and spouse of the habitual smoker. The wife and children of the cheating husband. The father and mother of the child killed in the auto accident that debilitated the reckless youth. Does God have some good reason for permitting those evils to proceed until these poor people are so terribly affected? The Christian must believe that He does, or else the God we worship would hardly seem worthy of such worship. And they had better be very good reasons indeed.

On January 8, 1956, when I was just a boy about to turn eight years old, the world was stunned by the news of the death of five young men in the jungles of Ecuador. These five men were Christian missionaries who were attempting to bring the good news of peace in Christ to one of the most violent and remote people in all the western hemisphere. The five men had made minimal contact from the air with members of the Auca tribe. Time had come to try to establish direct contact. The men landed their small aircraft on a strip of sand in the Curaray River bed in the jungle. Eventually, radio contact with the men was lost. An armed search party was assembled and sent to the site. The bodies of all five men, some of them husbands and fathers, were all found murdered in the waters and sands of the river. The story, as it unfolded over the news wires over the next several days, seemed unimaginably tragic and evil. What a waste of lives. What a loss to wives and children at the base station, and to family members back home. Why would God allow such evil to occur, and especially to those whose lives were so dedicated to Him and to bringing love and aid to people in such desperate need?

But a very strange thing began to happen in the following months and years. Elisabeth Elliot, wife of one of the murdered men, tells some of the story in a book first published barely a year after the events that took her husband's life. In an Epilogue written in November 1958 and appended to the original book, she reported that additional contact was established with women who had left the tribe and come out to civilization. Eventually, these women returned to their people and assisted in establishing further contacts with the wives of the murdered men. Finally:

Thus, on October 8, 1958, we arrived. The longed-for entrance had been made. The Aucas were friendly and helpful, receiving us as sisters, building us houses, sharing their meat and manioc. They say they killed the men only because they believed them to be cannibals. Basically, it was fear that led them to what they now regard as a mistake.

But we know that it was no accident. God performs all things according to the counsel of His own will. The real issues at stake on January 8, 1956, were very far greater than those which immediately involved five young men and their families, or this small tribe of naked "savages." Letters from many countries have told of God's dealing with hundreds of men and women, through the example of five who believed that "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."[63]

One of the wives, Rachel Saint, eventually lived among the Aucas for years. The Gospel of Christ came to these poor people, and eventually many within the tribe became disciples of Jesus. The vision of those five men was finally realized. But something far greater was also happening. As the news of the massacre spread across America and around the world, as Elisabeth Elliot reported, first hundreds, then thousands of young men and women, far from being deterred by the deaths of these five, were moved by the love of Christ to enlist in His mission to share the good news of Christ with those who had never heard. The impact of those five lives continues to inspire and motivate men and women even now, over half a century later. Why did God permit those men to be so brutally murdered? Because He knew of a far greater good. He knew of the untold thousands of men, women, and children who would enjoy the glories of heaven forever due to the sacrifice and suffering of these men and their families.

Sometimes God permits evil to occur because He knows it will be the catalyst for some far greater good. Sometimes He privileges us with discovering what that good is. Other times He leaves it as a mystery and asks us to trust Him.

There are even more reasons for permitting evil to exist. Some goods can only exist in the face of evil. For example, there could be no courage without peril. There could be no mercy without suffering. There could be no grace without offense. When we hear stories of such good, our hearts are warmed and stirred, not chiefly by the existence of the underlying evil, but rather by the remarkable heart qualities exhibited by women and men in the face of great evils.

It is also crucial to realize that the Christian view of the purpose of life is not that men and women be happy. Rather the chief purpose of life is the knowledge of God. The Apostle Paul says that he suffered the loss of all things in order that he might "know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings…" (Philippians 3:2, 10). William Lane Craig calls such knowledge of God an "incommensurable good."[64] This is not to say that our happiness is not a concern to God. Indeed, the Scriptures say a great deal about happiness. But happiness is not achieved by seeking happiness itself, but

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[63] Elizabeth Eliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*, (New York, NY., Harper and Row, 1957, 1958), 258

[64] Craig, p. 167

rather it flows from knowing and experiencing God. The knowledge of God comes first, and subsequently comes true, unalloyed happiness.

Of course, we often assume that happiness comes from having no suffering or pain. But actually true happiness comes from knowing God, and knowing God almost always involves some suffering, pain, and loss.[65] This is precisely the point that Paul made about the price he paid to know Christ. And it was in the crucible of great suffering, loss, and pain that righteous Job discovered volumes about the greatness of God. At the end he confessed to God: "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" (Job 42:5).

William Lane Craig addresses this aspect of the purposes of evil:

> We are not God's pets, and the goal of human life is not happiness per se, but the knowledge of God—which in the end will bring true and everlasting human fulfillment. Much of the suffering in life may be utterly pointless with respect to the goal of producing human happiness; but it may *not* be pointless with respect to producing a deeper knowledge of God.[66]

Another purpose of permitting evil in our lives is to develop character. As the cliché says: No pain, no gain. Helen Keller, who herself was blind and deaf, said:

> Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.[67]

Likewise, the Apostle Paul stressed to the Romans the virtue of tribulation:

> And not only this, but we exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint… (Romans 5:3-5).

Another reason for permitting suffering is that suffering often leads to men and women coming to a relationship with God and the forgiveness of their sins. Many an individual has turned to Christ only after undergoing a prolonged experience of struggle, loss, suffering, or even injustice. William Lane Craig points out that:

> …it is precisely in countries that have endured severe hardship that Christianity is growing at its greatest rates, while growth curves in the indulgent West are nearly flat.[68]

He cites China, El Salvador, and Ethiopia as examples of this phenomenon.

These are just some of the very good reasons that God *may* have for permitting some specific evil to occur or persist. Although God does not desire or seek evil to be actualized, because He is God He is able and willing to use evil for some far, far greater good. This does not alter the fact that evil is evil. It means rather that God in His

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[65] Moreland, Craig, p. 544

[66] Craig, p. 163

[67] Helen Keller, cited in Geisler, Bocchino, p. 239

[68] Craig, 164

goodness and providence can utilize the wickedness of men to accomplish some immeasurably greater good.

The story of Joseph in Genesis is an example. Joseph experienced considerable evil in his early life. He was despised by his jealous brothers. He was first exposed to die in a pit in the wilderness, then sold into slavery into Egypt. He served for years in the bondage of slavery, then was maliciously and falsely accused of attempted rape, then was imprisoned. He was forgotten by a powerful man who could have assisted him. By this point in the story our minds are reeling from all the lousy breaks this poor young man undeservedly encountered.

But, of course, we know the end of the story. Every one of these evils played a part in putting Joseph where he needed to be for God to do incomparable good both in and through Joseph. Eventually, Joseph was elevated to a place of great power and luxury. He was blessed with international influence. The entire rest of his life he enjoyed the trappings of being the second most powerful man in Egypt. He was reunited with his family and reconciled to his brothers.

But far more important than the blessing Joseph himself received, the greater good was that God used all the evil Joseph endured to preserve thousands of human lives from certain death by draught and famine. Not only did Joseph save the lives of his own family, but he preserved the entire nation of Egypt. Seen in this light, the thirteen years of suffering Joseph experienced in his early years pale in comparison to the vast good that God accomplished through his suffering. In Joseph's assessment of the situation which he shared with his brothers, he said: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

The dilemma we face as human beings is that, although God has very good reasons for permitting a specific evil in our lives, He often does not tell *us* those reasons. This reality moves us from the intellectual problem of evil to the emotional problem of evil. I will discuss that dimension of evil in a subsequent chapter.

However, an important issue remains to be addressed. So far we have considered primarily moral evil, the evil that results from the actions of free moral creatures. As yet, however, we have not tackled the problem of those evils which occur in the physical realm but have no apparent relationship to the actions of moral agents. It is to this question we will now turn.

THE PROBLEM WITH NATURAL EVIL

The problem of natural evil presents challenges to the Christian theist different, and in some ways more difficult, than the moral problem of evil. Since the cause of moral evil can be attributed to the unfettered choice of free moral agents, and since they are the efficient cause of such evil, God cannot be held responsible for such evil, nor was it possible for God to prevent such evil given man's free will.

However, what about events like earthquakes, natural wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, drought and famine, floods, disease, plagues, animal kingdom violence, and all sorts of evil in nature not directly attributable to the decisions of humans? These natural events have horrific impact on God's creatures every day. Did God intend for such evil to exist? When did it begin? Did He not create the world to have such natural phenomena, and if so, is He not to blame for all sorts of evil?

The problem of natural evil is made more complex by the belief of the majority of modern scientists in a very ancient world billions of years old. Many Christian theists also hold to an old earth view, even some who are creationists as well as theistic evolutionists. Inherent in an old earth view of the world, including creationist and theistic evolutionary models, is the presence of violence, death, and destruction over a period of billions of years, facilitating God's means of bringing about the world He wanted.

By way of contrast, young earth creationists typically view natural evil, including the natural upheavals in the earth, disease, and death and violence in the animal kingdom, as occurring only after the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin.

What are the ways in which Christians, both young earth and old earth, seek to address the problem of natural evil?

Old Earth Creationism and Natural Evil

From the perspective of the Christian theist who is addressing the problem of evil in the world, there are significant theological problems with old earth creationism. William Dembski, research professor in Philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, discusses a couple typical approaches to the old earth view, and why these are problematic, in his book *The End of Christianity*.

> What about old earth creationists? Have they done better at grasping both horns of this dilemma? Have they, in other words, successfully reconciled scientific and theological orthodoxy? The actual attempts at reconciliation that I've seen from old-earth creationists have struck me as inadequate if by theological orthodoxy one means a traditional understanding of the Fall that traces all natural and personal evil in the world to human sin.[69]

Dembski cites a couple of different approaches to the problem of evil which are held among old earth creationists. One such view holds that the Garden of Eden was not

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[69] William A. Dembski, *The End of Christianity, Finding A Good God In An Evil World*, (Nashville, TN, B & H Publishing Group, 2009), 78

free of death, decay, pain and suffering. There never was a perfect paradise. Citing Christian astrophysicist and apologist Hugh Ross, Dembski says:

> More generally, Ross suggests that God uses randomness, waste, and inefficiencies to bring about the "very good" world into which he placed Adam. The difficulty with this suggestion, which is made throughout the old-earth creationist literature, is that natural evil becomes simply a tool for furthering God's ends rather than a consequence of human sin. Old-earth creationism thus opens God to the charge of inflicting pain simply to advance a divine agenda.[70]

A variation on this theme is that offered by aerospace engineer and Christian apologist Mark Whorton. Whorton suggests as an alternative to the Perfect Paradise Paradigm, a Perfect Purpose Paradigm, in which God created a world of suffering in which to accomplish some future master plan. Dembski responds:

> But this, again, makes human suffering a means to an end. And even if this end is lofty, we are still being used. Used is used, and there is no way to make this palatable, much less compatible with human dignity. That's why Kant taught that we must treat fellow human beings not as means but as ends in themselves. And that's why, unless human suffering is permitted by God because we have, in some way, brought it on ourselves, Whorton's Perfect Purpose Paradigm becomes a cynical manipulation of means to justify otherwise high ends.[71]

So, the standard explanations of old earth creationists regarding the problem of natural evil falls into the trap of the logical problem of evil, making a good God responsible for vast amounts of unspeakable natural evil in the world. Further, they appear to compromise Christianity's historical orthodoxy of seeing all evil as a consequence of sin.

Retroactive Evil?

William Dembski is clearly unsatisfied with the theological implications of typical old earth creationist answers on this point. But Dembski is himself an old earth creationist.[72] In his concern to preserve orthodox Christianity's insistence that all evil in the world is the consequence of the Fall, he has put forth his own suggestion as to how the dilemma of evil prior to the Fall can be addressed—what he calls the "retroactive effects of the fall."[73]

Dembski's line of argument is involved and lengthy. He is concerned with maintaining theologically sound positions throughout, and so seeks to provide a clear biblical reasoning behind his suggested theodicy. He concludes that it is quite possible to be theologically orthodox as pertains to the fall, and still hold to an old earth view of creation. His answer, to oversimplify it, is that God, who, to use my term is "outside of time," is not constrained to act in a strictly chronological order from the point of view of

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[70] Dembski, 78, 79

[71] Dembski, 79

[72] Dembski, 36, 37

[73] Dembski, 124-155

humans in what he calls a *causal-temporal logic*.[74] Rather, according to Dembski, divine action follows an *intentional-semantic logic*.[75] Hence, God can work "transtemporally." [76] So, his conclusion is that God so acted within His own intentional-semantic logic in such a way that evil existed in the earth in response to Adam's sin but prior to the act, in Dembski's word, retroactively.

Dembski's theodicy may prove to be the only answer to the presence of natural evil in the world prior to the fall that adheres to an orthodox theology. However, it raises its own set of difficulties, not the least of which is that its logic appears to require a highly specialized aptitude with important theological and philosophical concepts. This, of course, does not disprove his theodicy, but it does seem to run counter to the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture.

On a related matter, Dembski's proffered solution to the old earth conundrum is clearly not what one gathers from a simple reading of the Genesis account. It requires the Christian to read the passage from the perspective of what Dembski calls God's "intentional-semantic logic." However, nothing in the text indicates that that is how the passage is to be interpreted, which is even more problematic since the great majority of Scripture is written to be understood from what he calls the human "causal-temporal logic." How are we to know that is how this particular passage is to be understood? Dembski provides only one really substantive answer as I see it: modern scientific orthodoxy on the age of the earth.

One final point about retroactive effects of the fall appears to raise considerable difficulty. How were Adam and Eve supposed to understand all this evil about them? Death, destruction, disease, and violence surrounded them, wiping out entire species, burying animals in avalanches of rock and debris. Animals devoured each other in violent and bloody episodes, with the prey obviously experiencing excruciating terror and pain. Adam and Eve, of all people, would have been in desperate need of a theodicy. Yet what is the answer for them? "All of this evil you see about you, all this death and mayhem, all this cataclysm and disease, all this evil is the effect of something you have not yet done, but will do." Dembski's theodicy for old earth natural evil appears intellectually unsatisfying to this writer.

Blame the Angels?

In *The End of Christianity*, Dembski points out that the historical position of the Christian church until the onset of the modern scientific era has always been that natural evil is a consequence of sin. Some notable Christians have argued that such evil is mostly the result of the fall of Satan and other fallen angels. For example, Alvin Plantinga calls natural evil "broadly moral," suggesting that it is quite reasonable to assign responsibility for it to the activity of Satan and demons. He cites St. Augustine as one who believed that

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[74] Dembski describes causal-temporal logic as "bottom-up and looks at the world from the vantage of physical causality. …The causal-temporal logic that underlies the physical world is the organizing principle for natural history (*chromos*)." 132

[75] Dembski describes intentional-semantic logic as "top-down and looks at the world from the vantage of the divine purpose and action. …The intentional-semantic logic that underlies divine action is the organizing principle for the order of creation (*kairos*)." 132

[76] Dembski, 124, 131-132

"natural evil (except for what can be attributed to God's punishment) is to be ascribed to the activity of beings that are free and rational but nonhuman."[77] C. S. Lewis is another renowned Christian who held to the view that natural evil is the consequence of Satan's activity.[78]

Briefly, Dembski details what he considers four significant problems with attributing natural evil directly to Satan. 1) How does a spirit being such as Satan interact with and control the material world? 2) Why would God permit a fallen spiritual being to wreak havoc in the physical world? Why should animals and humans be subject to the consequences of Satan's actions? 3) What sense does it make for God to call the creation "good" repeatedly, all the while Satan has been infecting it? 4) What is the point of God bestowing on man the rulership of the earth if throughout its existence Satan has been undermining it.

The reader, of course, probably notices that some of these objections pertain only if one is, like Dembski, an old earth creationist. Points 3 and 4 particularly have little weight with a young earth creationist. Pont 1 can be answered by pointing out that spirits are demonstrated in Scripture to at times interact in the physical world (e.g., Jesus casting demons into the swine).

While Dembski does not accept the notion of natural evil being directly the consequence of Satan's fall, nevertheless he does point out that historically orthodox theology, to which he also holds, "…allows that human evil opened the door to Satan to ravage the world."[79]

Man's Sin and Natural Evil

While finding a theologically sound explanation for natural evil is a considerable challenge for a Christian who believes in an old earth, for young earth creationists there appear to be two possible causes of natural evil, both of which are rooted in the consequences of sin. The first we just addressed; it is the result of Satanic/demonic activity. The second option, and the one that has been the historic position of the church for most of its existence, is that natural evil is the consequence of man's sin.

On the historical orthodoxy of this point Dembski asserts:

The claim that human sin has cosmic and transhistorical consequences has been a central theme of Christian orthodoxy.[80]

Dembski describes how this process has been viewed historically by Christians:

Sin, the condition of a fallen will that no longer finds fulfillment in God, leads to numerous individual sins—what may be called moral or personal evil. But besides personal evil, sin propagates through nature and brings about natural evil. So the disordered state of nature mirrors the disordered state of our souls.[81]

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[77] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, reprint, (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1977) (Orig. pub. Harper and Row, 1974), 58
[78] Dembski, 37, 38
[79] Dembski, 39
[80] Dembski, 36
[81] Dembski, 28

Throughout the history of the church believers have taken the testimony of Scripture at face value as it refers to the condition of the world. It seems quite clear when God addresses Adam and Eve directly after their sin that the world had just changed for the worse.

> Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-20).

There appears to be no ambiguity or confusion in God's mind as to the cause of natural evil in the world. It was *because* of Adam's sin.

The Apostle Paul's words to the Christians in Rome also speak to this dramatic shift in the condition of the natural world.

> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:20-23).

Paul's message to the Romans was that even as sin had permeated and corrupted their own beings, and that redemption from that corruption through Christ was their sure hope, so too had sin corrupted and caused the world to be "subjected to futility," and that it too, the whole of creation, was awaiting its own certain redemption through the work of Christ.

Elsewhere in Romans Paul makes it clear that death was introduced into the world through the sin of Adam.

> Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— (Romans 5:12)

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the link between the sin of God's people and the deteriorating condition of the earth. Though this is a reference to a time much later than the first sin, yet the connection between man's rebellion and the impact on the natural world began at the beginning, not only later in the history of the people of Israel.

> The earth mourns and withers, the world fades and withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away. The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who

live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left (Isaiah 24:4-6).

One mental picture that is helpful for me as I consider the impact of Adam's sin on the whole created order, is to think of casting a large stone into a still pond. It immediately sets in motion waves that spread out to the very shores of the pond. At the moment of Adam's sin, a tsunami of devastation and death proceeded out from the foot of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It went through the garden, out across all of God's good world, and on out into space to the farthest reaches of the furthest galaxy. All of creation thus groans under the futility to which Adam subjected it.

Perhaps there is no greater evidence that this creation is not the way God intended, but has been devastated by man's sin, than the promise of the consummation of all things in Christ when He will do away with this old world and replace it with a new world "in which righteousness dwells." The story of the book of Revelation is the story of man's sin having an increasingly greater devastating impact on the natural world. But in the end, Christ triumphs over the sin of man, redeems those who put their faith in Him, and then removes the first creation, replacing it with a new heavens and a new earth.

This has been the sure hope of believers throughout history; the coming great Kingdom of God. But why a new heavens and earth? In the beginning God created a "good creation" as a place for mankind to dwell and to rule over. If this good creation He designed for man's home, man's "paradise," contained all sorts of death, disease, catastrophes, and violence, then why the need for a new heavens and earth? If God originally intended man to live sinlessly in fellowship with Him in such a troubled world, why, in the redemption of man, is there a need for the concurrent redemption of the earth? Christians for nearly two millennia have always understood the answer to be that this present earth is not the way it was intended to be, that this world has been corrupted by our sin.

Having considered at length the intellectual problem of evil, which argues for either the impossibility or improbability of the existence of God, we have shown that both expressions of the intellectual problem of evil fail to meet the respective thresholds of proving their assertions. But the intellectual or philosophical problem of evil is only part of the real difficulty which we encounter as a result of evil. The emotional problem of evil remains before us as a daunting reality.

THE EMOTIONAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

It is possible to have a satisfactory answer to the intellectual problem of evil and yet to be faced with terrible anguishing pain. Having an intellectual answer to why evil exists does little to salve the burning heart of a person devastated with some great pain, loss, or injustice. Someone may know all the correct intellectual answers to the problem of evil, but when confronted with some great suffering in their own experience, may find their heart still asking if God is there, or if He is good and truly loves them, or if He perhaps bears some grudge against them. This is what we call the emotional problem of evil or suffering.

For the person who has not yet experienced such overwhelming evil in their own lives, the discussion of the emotional problem of evil may engender a bit of patronizing: "Oh, it's just your emotions. You'll get over it." Such a response is calloused, unhelpful, reflects an ignorance of the depth of the emotional problem of evil, and is contrary to God's own response to the emotional problem of evil.

Many a person, when confronted with the debilitating emotional impact of evil in their life, has jettisoned his or her belief in God altogether. In this case, the intellectual back and forth concerning evil may not even be considered. The emotional weight of their own personal experience of evil simply seems to push out any faith in God. Sometimes this may be an overt, conscious decision. At other times it may simply be a process of loosing one's grasp on God. This outcome is not inevitable, but it certainly is not infrequent.

My wife and I have a friend whom we have known for several decades. I will call him Bill. At one point before Bill was married he lived in our home. I had the privilege of performing his wedding. We spent much time together engaged in spiritual activities of trying to be a testimony for Christ on the local university campus.

But things for Bill did not go the way he had expected and hoped. He set aside his career aspirations in the hopes of joining with some other Christians in serving God. But over time, after he had married and had children, the possibilities of serving God in the ways he had expected collapsed. His mind reeled trying to understand how God could let this happen. Now he was left with a wife and children, but no viable career. He tried several options, but never got on his feet financially. His marriage struggled. His children, however, did well, and were one source of joy in his life.

Then we got the call. One of his teenage sons, his own namesake, was killed one night in an automobile accident. My wife and I joined them as Bill and his wife laid that remarkable young man in the ground. Bill's relationship with God, already a struggle at best, took a nosedive. Bill still believes that God exists, but his relationship with Him seems permanently crippled. How can he know and enjoy that God loves him, or believe that he is truly a child of a God who would permit such evil to occur in his life?

Therein lies the emotional problem of evil. When life comes crushing down around us, all the right intellectual answers may not seem enough to stem the tide.

Which Apologetic?

How is the Christian to answer the emotional problem of evil? While the primary apologetic for the intellectual problem of evil is vigorous logical and rational reasoning, I would suggest that the primary apologetic for the emotional problem of evil lies elsewhere.

The intellectual problem of evil lies primarily in the will and in the mind. The emotional problem of evil lies primarily in the heart and in the experience. Of course the mind and the heart cannot be completely divorced. A person struggling chiefly with the intellectual problem of evil may be doing so because of earlier experiences of evil which still touch the emotions. Likewise, the person overwhelmed with the emotional problem of evil may nevertheless have concrete intellectual questions that need to be answered.

Nevertheless, the distinction between the two needs to be kept in mind, and the wise Christian, when encountering someone struggling with the problem of evil, will seek carefully to discern which aspect of the problem is this person's primary need.

A striking lesson can be learned from the life of Jesus upon the loss of his dear friend, Lazarus. We read about this story in John 11. Of course there is much going on in this event which is beside our point. But there are some pertinent lessons.

When Jesus arrived late, as Lazarus' sisters supposed, Mary remained in the home, but Martha ran out to meet Him. They had expected Jesus to arrive in time to heal Lazarus, but as it was, Jesus had chosen to delay, and in the meantime Lazarus died. Of course we know that Jesus had a purpose in all of this, and it was his intent to raise Lazarus from the dead, which he eventually did.

But it is the intervening events to which I would like to call your attention. When Martha first came to Him and reproved Him, Jesus gently said some things intended to build her faith and give her hope, but these appear to have gone a bit over Martha's head. She didn't get the point. Eventually, she left to get her sister and bring her to Jesus. This is striking. Though they felt that Jesus had let them down, that Jesus had let their brother die, yet they wanted to be in His presence. What's going on here?

So, Mary joined Martha and went to be with Jesus. Many of the mourners who had been with the sisters in the house saw Mary slip out with Martha and they followed them. When Mary arrived at Jesus, she fell at His feet weeping, and, as her sister had done earlier, accused Jesus of failing them and Lazarus. The mourners who were by now gathering around were also weeping.

John tells us that at this point Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and was troubled." Then the entire party, the weeping mourners, the weeping sisters, and the deeply moved and troubled Jesus, proceeded to go to the place where Lazarus was entombed. At this point, upon Jesus seeing the tomb, comes the shortest verse in all the Bible: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

Now Christians have offered different explanations for why Jesus wept. Commonly I have heard that Jesus wept because he was grieved that they had not believed that He would raise Lazarus from the dead; he wept because of their unbelief. Of course, there is nothing in the text that says that is why Jesus wept. To the contrary, we do have an indication in the text as to why Jesus wept, and that is the response of the other mourners. The text says: "So, the Jews were saying, 'See how He loved him!'" (John 11:36).

There are two very profound things that are going on here prior to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. They are the felt presence of God (in this case Jesus), and the felt love of God. For the most part, the words of comfort that were spoken seemed to have had little impact. Yet it is clear that the sisters wanted the presence of God, and the mourners (and presumably the sisters too) noticed the love of God.

Here we have Jesus' apologetic for the emotional problem of evil. Yes, He spoke a few words, most of which seemed to have little impact. But what did matter, what really did minister to the sisters and the other mourners, was the presence of God and the tears of God. His presence and his tears showed them God still loved them, that God was still good. Eventually, Lazarus' resurrection showed them that God was still omnipotent.

So where does that leave us? When we encounter someone overcome by the emotional problem of evil, what can we do? When someone is tempted to doubt God in the midst of the experience of suffering, what they need most is to experience God. When experience tells us God does not exist, or that God is not good, then experiencing the existence of God and the goodness of God is the best answer. As Christians, we are God's expression of Himself on earth. We can demonstrate in our actions the love of God to them. We can sit with them. We can listen to them. We can weep with them. We can be a visible expression of Jesus in the lives of those who are hurting. Without any words, we can be a powerful apologetic to the emotional problem of evil.

> What can be said to those who are laboring under the emotional problem of evil? In one sense, the most important thing may not be what one says at all. The most important thing may be just to be there as a loving friend and sympathetic listener.[82]

It is instructive, in the story of Job in the Old Testament, that Job's friends, when they first arrived to comfort Job, sat silently with him on the ash heap for seven days. It was only when they opened their mouths that things started going badly for Job and for them.

> Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that *his* pain was very great (Job 2:13).

A Time For Words

But I would be remiss to suggest there is never a time or place for words when someone is suffering the emotional problem of evil. Jesus did offer words of hope and encouragement to Martha and Mary. I would not suggest that they were of no consequence. Certainly, they have provided great comfort to millions of believers in the subsequent millennia. And I suspect that at the time they were also of some comfort to Martha and Mary, although they didn't grasp their full significance at the moment.

So, what kind of answers can we give to someone in such pain?

Consider another lesson we glean from the story of Job. When his three friends did finally begin to speak to Job's suffering, they tried to give what they thought were the likely reasons for his suffering and what Job should do about it. Unfortunately, they

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[82] J. P. Moreland, William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2003), 551

really had no idea about why Job was suffering or why God had permitted these great evils in Job's life, so their words only hindered and did not help. In the end they needed to bring a sin offering to Job to offer to God on their behalf.[83] While on occasion we may know why someone is suffering, in most cases it is likely we don't. Lest we sin against God and heap further evil on the sufferer, we need to be very careful about suggesting reasons for why God is permitting such evil.

However, there are actually a number of truths that when spoken in gentleness and at the opportune time may be a help to someone in the deepest of pain. We can share the certainty of God's tender love for them. We can remind them that God never takes pleasure in evil; that it is not His desire. We can assure them that God, like Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, enters into and feels their suffering. Alvin Plantinga touches on this idea:

> As the Christian sees things, God does not stand idly by, coolly observing the suffering of his creatures. He enters into and shares our suffering. …Some theologians claim that God cannot suffer. I believe they are wrong. God's capacity for suffering, I believe, is proportional to his greatness; it exceeds our capacity for suffering in the same measure as his capacity for knowledge exceeds ours. …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.[84]

We can remind the person who is suffering of this precious reality, that God enters into our pain, that in Jesus we see God purposefully entering into the experience of human suffering, not reluctantly, but willingly.

On a similar note, the Psalmist speaks of God as a "very present help in trouble," a "refuge" and a "strength." This strength is provided to the sufferer not from a distance, not from arm's length, but by the One who is "very present" (Psalm 46:1). This is the God who has commanded His children to "visit the orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27). Would He do less?

While we cannot often know God's purpose for permitting some particular evil in our lives, we can encourage the struggler with the comfort that even though we, like Job, may be unaware of His purpose, He is not without one. And knowing His goodness we can be comforted to know that whatever His purpose, it is immeasurably good.

Finally, as I will show in the last chapter, we have the blessed assurance that in the end God will turn all evil into a good so great, so glorious, so infinite, that it will stagger the mind and render the present suffering only a distant and obscure memory.

Every man or woman who has been a loving and involved parent knows what it is like to watch our children go through necessary suffering. Particularly when our children are very young, they may encounter problems that require unpleasant and even painful measures to correct, yet the child has no understanding of why. When one of our daughters was very young it was necessary for medical reasons for her to have regular blood tests taken. Even as a small infant, and later as a tiny little girl a needle would need to be inserted into her arm to draw a vial of blood. Even now, over thirty years later, as I

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[83] Job 42:7-9
[84] Plantinga, cited in Moreland, Craig, p. 551

write about this, tears come to my eyes. Many were the times when I, as her father, would need to lean over her tiny body on the examination table, forcefully restraining her as the nurse inserted the needle, all the while my daughter screamed in pain and protest while her tiny body convulsed in resistance. How could I love her and do this to her was her inarticulate scream. Yet it was precisely *because* I loved her that I held her tightly so the needle could be inserted. So it is with God. He loves us immeasurably, and that is often the very reason we suffer the things we do.

It is truths such as these that we can share, only in the proper time and manner, with those who are in great pain. Indeed, they are the very truths we can cling to ourselves when evil overwhelms us.

A FINAL WORD: THE WEIGHT OF GLORY

And so, we have considered evil from a number of angles. We know it to be a state of affairs where the good is absent, or where good things don't relate right to each other. At times it can be merely irritating, but far too often it becomes something so horrific, so unimaginable, that we can barely even make our minds contemplate it. Who would have known that the mere absence of good could be so incalculably terrible, so pervasive, so persistent?

But now we have at least some understanding of why there is evil. Now we understand that God, in His goodness, created something incommensurately good. He created creatures, made in His image, creatures with a moral nature, imaging His own moral nature. But, of course, to do so, He had to take what appears to us to be a great risk. He had to imbue those creatures with freedom. Without that freedom, there would be no moral creatures.[85]

The risk (or so it seems to us), of course, was that man would use his remarkable gift of freedom to choose evil. As we know, that is precisely what happened, and from that tragic choice flows all that we know of as evil.

We know, too, that this did not take God by surprise. He knew what Adam would do, just as He knows every evil choice that you or I will make. Some have argued, of course, that God should have known better, or that He could have done better. But, as we have seen, we are not in the place to make such judgments, and that, in fact, there are actually many good reasons why a good God might permit the evil we see. We have learned that there is a great deal of evidence that the good of this world, all the good God created, plus all the good that flows from evil, actually outweighs the evil and justifies God's having made free moral creatures.

So, is that it? Is that the end of the matter? God is good. Evil exists. Good outweighs the evil. Period.

Well, thankfully, no. Not by a long shot.

What else is there? Eternity.

Would Joseph Choose Suffering?

But first, let's consider a few lessons from Scripture. Remember the story of Joseph that I talked about earlier in the chapter about the purposes of evil? There were two key points in that story. The first, of course, was that God was able to work providentially in events so that the evil that others intended actually turned out for good. But the other aspect of Joseph's experience that is so striking was the scale of good that resulted. Joseph endured great evil for thirteen years. His father, Jacob, also suffered greatly for over twenty years thinking his son was dead. It was a terrible suffering endured by these two men, father and son.

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[85] See Excursus: On The Freedom Of God

But when the tables finally turned, when it was finally time for God to carry out His remarkable plan, the good began to rush in like a flood. About this man who only hours before was a dirty, unshaven prisoner, Scripture says:

> So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you." Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt" (Genesis 41:38-45).

But this was only the beginning of the good. Eventually there was reconciliation with his brothers and reunion with his beloved father. There were the eighty more years of Joseph's life in which he enjoyed the blessings of his high position, and the joys of a wife and children and grandchildren. There was the pleasure of being, once again, a respected member of the Sons of Israel.

But all of this is just a tiny portion of the good that flowed out of the evil. Joseph's life was just one life. But there were many others. There was Jacob, who lived out his days with an intact family, more united than it had ever been. There was the life of Asenath, Joseph's wife, and all the pleasure and good of which she herself became a partaker through her husband Joseph, including the children he fathered through her. And of course there were the sons of Joseph and all the good and pleasure they enjoyed in life.

Yet still we have seen but only a fragment of the good that came from Joseph's suffering. There was the entire family of Jacob, whose lives were spared from famine because of Joseph. And from those spared lives came an entire nation, and through that nation, according to the promise of God to Abraham, comes blessing to all the nations of the earth.

The first of the nations to be recipients through Joseph of that promise was Egypt itself, the very nation that had enslaved and imprisoned him. The very existence of Egypt was owed to Joseph. So multiple thousands of lives were saved, and those souls went on to enjoy the all the pleasures of life. And, of course, not the Egyptians only, but thousands from the surrounding nations heard of the abundance in Egypt and came to find sustenance and life.

The good that God intended and redeemed out of the evil is so overwhelmingly greater than the evil, that it is nearly impossible to draw a comparison. I dare say that had Joseph known, before he went to find his brothers at Dotham when he was but a young man, about all the good that his life would provide, and if he were told that in order to accomplish all that good he would have to suffer terribly for thirteen years, it would be

no surprise if Joseph would have chosen to endure the suffering for the sake of the overwhelming good.

Beyond All Comparison

The Apostle Paul provides us with a similar, but slightly different perspective. Perhaps few Christians in the history of the church have encountered, over the entire period of their lifetime ministry, as much suffering for Christ as did Paul. Addressing the Corinthian church he shared his perspective that all his suffering made it possible for people to see Christ, rather than himself.

> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you (2 Corinthians 4:7-12).

Notice how Paul speaks of being afflicted "in every way," of being "persecuted," of being "constantly delivered over to death." His point, of course, is that by suffering in such ways, it became obvious that the great things that happened in his ministry were the result of the power of God and not from himself. This is another reason for God permitting evil in our lives, but this is not the point I want us to consider here.

One might wonder if Paul was not exaggerating a bit in this passage. Some things he says in other places shows how little exaggeration this was.

> For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:8, 9).

In a previous letter to the same church he had referred to being "in danger every hour," and having "fought with wild beasts at Ephesus" (1 Corinthians 15:30, 32). (Whether he refers here to actual wild animals, or if this is a metaphor for a murderous mob is not clear. However, the peril remains daunting.)

Near the close of the second letter to the Corinthians mentioned earlier, he actually details at considerable length some of the things he suffered. There were some who were attempting to discredit Paul's ministry and to undermine his influence with the Corinthian believers:

> Are they servants of Christ?–I speak as if insane–I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on

frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? …The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands (2 Corinthians 11:23-33).

Talk about evil and suffering! It is no wonder Paul says to the Galatian church: "From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus" (Galatians 6:16).

But here is the startling thing for us to consider: What was Paul's own attitude towards all this suffering? One might think Paul would be just a bit put off at God for allowing him to endure all this evil. After all, he was out there doing the work that God called him to do. Was there ever a more faithful servant of God than Paul? One could understand if Paul had complained to God as St. Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) is reported to have said to the Pope: "If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so many enemies."

But what was Paul's attitude towards all this evil? He told the Corinthians "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17). What was that? "Momentary light affliction?" This is the remarkable truth which Paul understood about all that evil he had suffered. It was, in fact, just a momentary light affliction. But it sure doesn't read like a momentary light affliction in those passages we just considered, does it? It seems like an overwhelming list. So how could Paul say it was a momentary light affliction?

The key is in the next thing Paul says. He says that it is "producing an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." Now, anything that happens in this life, when compared to eternity, is just a momentary thing, even if it is endured for a lifetime. As John Newton's old hymn says, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun."[86]

When Paul has been in heaven for ten thousand years, how do you think he will view the duration of his suffering here on earth? It will have been just a dim, distant memory—a mere moment in his life.

But there is more. There will also be a great exchange. Upon entering eternity Paul will lay down all that suffering, and will receive what all that suffering has now been turned into, a "weight of glory beyond all comparison." In fact, he says that the affliction was actually *producing* that far greater weight of glory. What Paul is referring to is the same principle we saw in the life of Joseph, except that here it is from eternity's vantage point. With Joseph we saw all the immeasurable blessing and good in this life that came from the evil he suffered. But with Paul's words we discover that the evil the

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[86] *Amazing Grace*

child of God encounters in this life will be infinitely outweighed by an astonishing amount of glory that will last for all eternity.

The Joy Set Before Him

We are beginning to see a pattern here from Scripture. Now let's consider the greatest example of all of this principle at work: the crucifixion of Jesus, the Son of God. There has never been, in all the world's dark history, an evil more horrible, more ghastly, than when sinners took in their hands the perfect, innocent, Son of God. They betrayed Him. They falsely accused Him. They mocked and ridiculed Him. They beat and whipped Him repeatedly. They carried out rigged trials to convict Him with false witnesses. They forced Him to carry His weighty execution stake upon His battered, broken, and bleeding body to the place of public execution. By this point He was so spent from all the abuse that He stumbled, unable to carry the weight.

Eventually, the crucifixion party arrived at Golgotha, a crossroads of major thoroughfares just outside the city walls. There they stripped Jesus naked and forced him to lie upon His cross while large metal spikes were hammered through His hands and feet to secure Him to the cross. Finally he was lifted up high on the cross for all passersby to see—naked, mangled, gasping for every tortured breath.

All of this evil and suffering is utterly unimaginable to our modern sensibilities. Yet this is only a miniscule fraction of what Jesus suffered that day. All that I have described so far was the finite part. But there was something far more horrible He was yet to encounter. While hanging there, this Jesus, who Scripture says was with His Father when all the "morning stars sang together" at creation, this Jesus who, when in prayer only hours before, had spoken of the wonderful love relationship He and the Father had enjoyed from eternity, was about to encounter the unthinkable. He was about to be forsaken by the Father as He took upon Himself the sins of the world. At His darkest hour He cried out, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" Unequaled, incomprehensible evil. God the Father forsakes the God the Son because on Him were laid the sins of the world.

But the Son didn't have to do it. Earlier that evening at his arrest Jesus had told His disciples, "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). Clearly Jesus could have, with a simple word to His Father, been delivered from the horror that lay before Him. But, not only did He not seek to escape the cross, Luke tells us that He had "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51 KJV). Jesus was determined to suffer the agony and shame of the cross. Why?

The writer of Hebrews tells us.

> …fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Indeed, Jesus was determined to go through the agony of the cross "for the joy set before Him." Jesus was willing to undergo the worst evil to ever happen in all the long history of evil, because He knew it would be turned into something so gloriously great, so magnificently good, that it would be worth suffering the infinite pain of being estranged from His own Father for that moment in human time.

What was that good that was worth so much suffering? As He had said to his Father in prayer only hours before:

> I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world (John 17:19-24).

That great good was that all those who placed their trust in Christ would be untied with Jesus and with His Father, that they would know Him, that they would experience the infinite goodness and love of the Father for eons without end. This was the joy He anticipated. This was the joy that took Him to the cross and beyond. This had been the plan from eternity long past, when God knew the awful choice that Adam would make in the Garden. So the greatest evil in human history, the crucifixion of the Son of God, is turned by the power and goodness of God into the greatest good unimaginable. This is such a startling and unexpected turn of events, that Scripture says that had the "rulers of this age" known what good that evil would be turned to, they "would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Corinthians 2:8).

Think back, now, on these three lives we've just considered, Joseph, Paul, and Jesus. These are only some of the examples we can cite from Scripture. Yet they provide a powerful lesson about evil. What they tell us is that, for the child of God, all the evil that ever was, from the Fall in the Garden to last act of persecution and rebellion in Revelation, all of it will ultimately be turned by the power of God into a good beyond human comprehension. That is how great God is.

It is important to remember, as well, that God does not merely set the evil aside and put something good in its place. Rather, He actually somehow redeems the evil and causes good to come out of that very evil. Such is the cross. The greatest symbol of shame in the ancient world, the Roman cross, was transformed into something we cover with gold and hang around our necks, or use to adorn our homes and buildings.

The problem of evil? How great is God? This is how great He is. Consider all the evil in all the history of the world, all the brutality, all the violence, all the injustice, all the holocausts, all the lies, all the oppression. Heap it up into one terrible ghastly pile. In the day of the consummation of all things, that entire pile of evil will be forever changed into a good that not only outweighs it, but outweighs it exponentially!

So, in the end of this great contest between evil and God, God wins. But to use the metaphor of an athletic contest, in the end the score will not be 3-2. No, God's good so triumphs over evil that the score difference will be infinitely impossible to calculate. The good indeed will be, as Paul says, an eternal weight of glory!

Soli Deo Gloria!

EXCURSUS A: On The Freedom Of God

      Central to the Free Will Defense's answer to the problem of evil is the assertion that God created free moral creatures, and that such moral freedom in His creatures necessitated the capability to choose to do either good or evil.

      Naturally, this raises a question about God Himself. If moral freedom in man (and angels) requires the capacity to choose to do either good or evil, then why not also in God? To answer this question we must consider the nature of God's freedom.

      Geisler lists three aspects to the nature of God's freedom.[87] First, God's freedom has no external compulsion. No action of God is ever caused by another, but neither can they ever be uncaused, since the principle of causality says there must be a cause for every event.[88] Hence, all God's actions are self-caused.

      Second, God's actions can never be *internally* compelled. As Geisler points out, "forced freedom" is a contradiction regardless of whether the coercion is external or internal. All of God's actions (e.g., creation) flow freely from His will.[89]

      Third, all of God's actions must be internally consistent with His nature. So while all His actions flow freely from His will, none can contradict His essential nature. This is why Scripture says God cannot lie or fail, nor cause Himself to cease to exist.

      So then, in consideration of these things, how is it that true freedom in man entails the ability to do good *or* evil, but not so with God? The difference lies in the essential difference between God and man, and in the nature of freedom. God, in His essence, *is* all goodness. As such, all good comes from and finds its source in God. God is good in His eternally existent being. The nature of God is goodness, and to cease to be good would be to cease to be God. Since God cannot cease to exist, he cannot do evil.[90]

      Man, on the other hand is not good in his essence in the same way that God is. The proof of this is that when a person does evil, he does not cease to be a person. He retains all the essential attributes of personhood.

      So, we see that the key distinction between the freedom of man and the freedom of God has to do with the essential nature of each. Moral freedom for God entails the ability to choose between two (or more) morally good alternatives (e.g., to create or not to create). Moral freedom for man entails, additionally, the ability to choose between two (or more) morally good alternatives, or between good and evil.

      At this juncture it is helpful to recall what we learned earlier regarding the nature of freedom. Let's return to something Geisler and Brooks pointed out:

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[87] Norman L. Geisler, "The Origin of Salvation," vol. 3, *Systematic Theology*, (Bloomington, MN, Bethany House Pub., 2004), 188, 189

[88] There is distinction between *actions* and *being*, the former always having the necessity of a cause, but God could not cause His own *being*, hence He always existed.

[89] Geisler, 189

[90] Norman L. Geisler, "The Origin of Sin," vol. 3, *Systematic Theology*, (Bloomington, MN, Bethany House Pub., 2004), 86, 87

But the opposite of freedom is not fewer alternatives, it is being forced to choose one thing and not another. Freedom is not in *unlimited options*, but in *unfettered choice* between whatever options there are. …Free will means the ability to make an **unforced decision** between two or more alternatives.[91] (all emphases theirs)

This is an important concept about freedom—that it consists in unfettered choice, not unlimited options. So the key with human freedom is that, given the option to do either good or evil, for humans to be free they must have "unfettered" choice between those two options. But Adam and Eve had other options as well. Recall that God had said to Adam:

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16, 17).

So, actually, Adam and Eve had other options. They could have eaten or not eaten of any other tree in the Garden. Had they chosen to eat of any other tree, their action would have still been a free, unfettered choice. The difference is that any of the other options would have been morally good. Let's put it this way: they could have done A (morally wrong), or not A (morally good), additionally they could have done B (morally good) or not B (morally good). But the key to freedom in this is not how many choices they had, but rather the unfettered nature of the decision regarding the choices they possessed.

Applying the same aspects of freedom to God, we realize that God is free (has unfettered choice) regardless of the number of options which He confronts. His freedom does not consist in unlimited options, but rather in unfettered choice between the options He possesses.

Now let us recall what we have learned about the nature of evil. Evil is not a thing, but rather it is a state of affairs that has been actualized. Further, we know that such a state of affairs is not the presence of something, but rather the absence of good or a wrong relationship between otherwise good things.

But God is, in essence, good. Wherever God is acting, good is being actualized. It cannot be otherwise, since God is in essence good, and for Him to actualize evil would mean for Him to cease to exist as God. This is impossible. So the option to do evil is not a logical possibility for God. God cannot do the logically impossible. Yet God is free, because He possesses numerous other good options for which He has unfettered choice. (Even as Adam and Eve had other options of fruit in the Garden, all other of which were good choices.)

The question now remains, though, as to why God could not make mankind with the same freedom which He possessed: the freedom to do only good.

The answer to this lies in the nature of what it means to love God. God's desire was to make creatures who would enjoy a love relationship with Him. But, as we have seen, "love" that is coerced is not love from the person forced, but narcissism on the part

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[91] Norman L. Geisler, Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1990), 63

of the one coercing. To love God there had to be a freedom to choose to love Him. The only other option to loving Him is to not love Him. But God is in His essence good. To not love God is to not love good, which is evil. It is necessary, then, that for man to be free, he must have the capacity to chose not God, i.e., to choose evil. Those are the only two options available to man: love God/good or not love God/actualize evil.

So, how about God? What were his options regarding loving man? For His love to be real love, it also must be freely chosen. But did God have any real alternatives pertaining to man, other than loving man, that did not entail evil? Yes. God had another alternative which He could have freely chosen which did not include loving man but also did not entail doing evil. That option was to not create man at all. Since we know that God, being good, can only do good, and since we know the freedom of God means He was compelled neither externally nor internally to create (see the three aspects of the nature of God's freedom above), we know that God was free to either create or not create man, and either choice would have been good. But God chose to create man (a good choice) rather than to not create man (another good choice), and in doing so He was freely choosing to love mankind.

So, we can see how God's freedom in loving man was possible without the option to do evil, but that it is impossible for man to love God without the option to do evil.

EXCURSUS B: The Problem Of Hell

As the reader considered the things I discussed in the chapter on the weight of glory, one thing unstated was likely obvious. All that I said about God redeeming an exceedingly great glory out of evil is true for the child of God, for the man, woman, or child whose faith is in Christ. But the question remains: What about those who don't know God, who have not believed?

As uncomfortable as it may seem to us, and in spite of the teachings of some Christians, Jesus and the Bible are quite clear. After death all mankind faces God's judgment, and those whose sins are not forgiven through faith in Christ's death face an "eternal punishment" (e.g. Hebrews 9:27; Matthew 25:31-46.)

God is not passé about man's choice to do evil. It is true that He gifted us with moral natures and the capacity to do good or evil. He was willing to take that "risk," in order that we could experience the exceedingly exquisite pleasure of knowing and being known by Him. But the fact that He imbued our choices with moral significance does not mean that He was indifferent to the choices we would make (Romans 1:18, 19). Indeed, such choices are moral precisely because God cares a great deal about them. God is God. He is the essence of good.

Our choice to do evil was far more than a simple choice against good. It was a choice against God. It was a personal affront to His holiness. It was, in point of fact, a rejection of God, a choice to live our lives apart from God. As we saw in the second chapter of this paper, evil is a state of affairs in which good is absent, or in which good things exist in a relationship contrary to their created purpose. When we chose to act contrary to God's will, we were choosing something other than good, because God *is* good. Without good our choice was of necessity evil. Further, when we chose to do evil, we broke the good relationship with God we were intended to have and became hostile to Him (Genesis 3:8; Colossians 1:21). So, our sin actually exhibits both dimensions of the nature of evil.

But, of course, God had a plan. And that plan was to provide a means whereby our sinful choice could be forgiven, we could again choose good, and we could have our relationship with Him restored. That plan came at a terrible cost to Him personally.

However, God could not simply disregard our choice and force those who wanted nothing to do with Him, who wanted to live their lives apart from good, to now live in His presence forever. If someone rejects God's plan to redeem us out of our evil, then that person simply remains under the wrath of God. It is a moral choice they have made, a consequence of misusing the freedom with which God created them.

The choice lies before us. Having chosen evil rather than God, having chosen to live apart from God, will we now turn from such evil, receive the forgiveness He offers to us in the agonizing suffering and death of His own Son on the cross, and be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20)?

Here lies the terrible reality of evil. For those who reject the one provision God has made to redeem them, there remains only the "terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (Hebrews 9:27). To so reject God's

love and provision means that one has chosen to live apart from the presence of God, apart from the presence of good. The only thing left is evil. That is what hell is. Hell is that place where there is no good—forever.

It is my prayer and hope that every reader of this paper will respond to God's offer of redemption, repent of the evil choices they have made, and cast themselves in faith on the mercy of God, believing that in His Son's death on the cross a sufficient atonement for their choices has been made.

For such ones as this, Jesus made the remarkable promise:

> For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

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