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JEFFREY MATTHEW ROBINSON
ROCKY MOUNT, VIRGINIA
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INTRODUCTION

Thesis: The point and purpose of this paper is to provide necessary epistemic safeguards for the formulation of claims against the existence of God from seemingly gratuitous evil. In addition, this paper will offer an angle of the biblical paradigm that both allows for both divine sovereignty and human culpability in relation to the problem of evil. Atheists frequently overstep their epistemic grounds in the milieu of assumed naturalism whereas the theist is *a priori* shouldered with the burden of proof. As will be demonstrated in this paper, the epistemic grounds and the anthropological presuppositions of atheistic arguments from both the logical and evidential problem of evil should be examined with the same rigor as theistic defenses are scrutinized. Furthermore, it will be demonstrated that to fully “prove” such claims requires a philosophical down payment that is virtually impossible to pay given the limited human epistemic access to such data. The biblical paradigm on the problem of evil is such that God, being omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient, chose in His good pleasure to create a world in which free creatures were free to act according to their nature. The fall from grace of Adam and Eve fractured the moral fabric of divine-human relationship.¹ Through the incarnation, God, in Christ, entered into human existence as a human.² Not only did Christ fulfill the moral requirements of God’s Law but set forth an ethical standard so high that it revolutionized the functionality of intra-personal human relationships.³ In Christ’s actions one finds greater acts of kindness than Siddhartha Gautama in caring for the ill,⁴ “Gadfly-esque” statesmanship unafraid

¹ Genesis 1-3.

² Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-52; John 1:1-18.

³ Although not a purely academic source, one can find such concepts illustrated in, D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcomb, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994).

⁴ See, Keith Yandell and Harold Netland, *Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009). In a fascinating parallel, the “Four Sights” that triggered the “Great Renouncement” of the young Siddhartha Gautama were also encountered by Jesus except for the wandering mendicant (one could argue that Jesus the wandering rabbi whose *modus operandi* was to give, not beg. Even from his childhood, Jesus had an overwhelming purpose that guided His life. Whereas the Four Sights caused a crisis of worldview within

to challenge the status quo of the corrupt political and religious system,⁵ and the curious ingredient of entreating God for mercy on behalf of his torturers (a virtue unmatched by any other religious leader).⁶ Yet with one unique distinction: the Christian claim that the death of Christ was propitiatory in nature in that it was to serve as a sacrifice for the sins of the world⁷ and that the bodily resurrection of Christ confirms not only the testimony of the Hebrew prophets about Jesus but also Jesus' claims about Himself.

I. Why is there any evil at all?

Ever since the dawn of humanity the problem of evil has been a standard component of what makes up the human condition. From the cries of Gilgamesh over the loss of Enkidu in the ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh* from the 18th century B.C.E., to over 4,200 writings on the subject from 1960 to 1990 alone (roughly “one publication every two and a half days”),⁸ the problem of evil remains, for many, an intractable roadblock to theism. Peter Kreeft captures this sentiment

Siddhartha Gautama, Jesus simply healed the ill, the lame, and raised the dead. Suffering caused the Buddha to seek the safety of Enlightenment whereas Jesus sought to defeat evil. The intellectual thrust of Siddhartha Gautama's philosophy was “...to wonder about the inescapability of suffering and death.” Lawrence S. Cunningham and John J. Reich, *Culture and Values: A Survey of the Humanities*. Vol. 1. 6th ed. (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 175. On the other hand, Jesus willingly embraced suffering and death and through the resurrection, conquered both of them. John 10:17-18 reads, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

⁵ See, Carl J. Richard, *Twelve Greeks and Romans who Changed the World* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 97. Upon being given the death sentence, Socrates declared, “It is not death which is difficult to escape, gentlemen; no, it is far more difficult to escape wickedness, which pursues us more swiftly.”

⁶ Luke 23:34.

⁷ Not to be confused with universal salvation, only that Christ's death was sufficient for all persons but only efficacious for those who would believe. John 3:16; I John 2:1.

⁸ Daniel Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument From Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), ix.

with the statement, “The problem of evil is the most serious problem in the world.”⁹ One needs only to observe the world to understand the depth of Kreeft’s statement.

One of the first questions deals with the compatibility of God and evil. J.L. Mackie argues:

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three.¹⁰

For Mackie, it is logically impossible to dovetail the seemingly contradictory triangle of benevolence, omnipotence and evil. Either God is not benevolent, and is thus, a morally capricious being, or God is not omnipotent, thus denigrating the power of God to less than that of the greatest conceivable being. Mackie reasons that since God, as the greatest conceivable being, should and could alleviate suffering, coupled with the continued existence of evil, God’s existence is therefore rendered logically impossible.¹¹ Mackie’s objection finds its root in the Greek philosopher Epicurus by way of David Hume’s charge against theism. Epicurus’ 3rd-4th century B.C.E. challenge reads:

God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or he is able and unwilling; or he is neither willing nor able, or he is both willing and able. If he is willing and is unable, he is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God if he is able and unwilling, he is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if he is neither willing nor able he is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does he not remove them?¹²

⁹ Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 54.

¹⁰ J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” in *The Problem of Evil: Oxford Readings in Philosophy*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25.

¹¹ J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹² William Dyrness, *Christian Apologetics in a World Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1983), 153.

Hume writes almost fourteen centuries later, “Epicurus’ old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”¹³ Yet even if Mackie’s version of the Humean/Epicurean challenge is logically valid, could not the sword cut both ways? Boethius springs off this idea when he inquires, “If God exists whence evil; but whence good if God does not exist?”¹⁴ Does not evil, as an absolute moral perversion, imply the existence of some sort of absolute moral standard?

Contra-Mackie, Alvin Plantinga lodges his “Freewill Defense” which has revolutionized the philosophical world since its publication in 1974. Plantinga responds by challenging the concept of burden of proof. Plantinga writes, “The theist believes that God has a reason for permitting evil; he doesn’t know what that reason is. But why should that mean that his belief is improper or irrational?”¹⁵ The atheists’ charge that the theist does not know *why* God allows for the existence of evil in no way serves as a defeater for theism. The *a priori* burden of proof upon the theist to provide specific answers while the atheist has full privilege of launching any number of postulates from the fabled zone of neutrality; Plantinga shows to be entirely unwarranted. Plantinga counters Mackie’s claim, “If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs,” by way of an example of persons who reveal “creative moral heroism in the face of suffering and adversity—a heroism that inspires others and creates a good situation out of a bad one.”¹⁶ Plantinga introduces this postulate with, “Now suppose that some good state of affairs *G* includes an evil state of affairs *E* that it outweighs. Then not even an

¹³ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard Popkin, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 63.

¹⁴ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973), 153.

¹⁵ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 22-23.

omnipotent being could eliminate *E* without eliminating *G*.”¹⁷ At the forefront of Plantinga’s argument is the tacit assumption of atheists who uncritically accept the inherent contradictoriness of God and evil and “make no attempt whatever to *show* that it is.”¹⁸ The atheist must first show *why* God and evil are incompatible in order to argue from that premise.

Plantinga also makes the case that “A really top-notch universe requires the existence of free, rational, and moral agents; and some of the free creatures He created went wrong.”¹⁹ Simply put, a very strong response to the question, “Why is there any evil at all?” is Plantinga’s point that a necessary component of the best conceivable world includes free creatures, not robots, whose freedom carries the propensity for almost certain abuse of that freedom in some cases. The central value judgment of the argument is simply, “A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all.”²⁰ Moral virtues such as love, loyalty, patience, self-control, and bravery would not be considered virtues if such actions were the only option. The atheist is then left with the option of arguing that God should not have created any world unless there was a sort of “evil-free” guarantee, even if God could bring about a greater good from the existence of evil.²¹

Yet the “Free Will Defense” may not be entirely satisfying. For example, Christians holding to the impeccability of Jesus would hold that transworld depravity, as the necessary

¹⁷ Ibid, 22.

¹⁸ Ibid, 23.

¹⁹ Ibid, 27.

²⁰ Ibid, 30.

²¹ Plantinga notes, “Some have objected to the free-will defense on the grounds that it presupposes that there are such things as counterfactuals of freedom, that they have truth values, and that God can know them. It is the atheologian, however, who really needs these suppositions; things are easier, not harder, for the free-will defense if we reject these assumptions.” Alvin Plantinga, “Epistemic Probability and Evil,” in *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder, 94.

byproduct of free will, would not apply to Jesus.²² Hence, there is a possible exception to the alleged universality of transworld depravity. Hence, relying upon Plantinga's Free Will Defense (FWD), in all possible worlds may not be exhaustively warranted. However, to discard the FWD upon these grounds alone is to fundamentally misunderstand its purpose: it is a defense (comparable to a parrying blow), not a theodicy (a devastating knockout punch).

The biblical picture is that God lovingly created a world in which the first persons, Adam and Eve, were provided a plush and luxurious existence yet with the lone stipulation of not eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). When they disobeyed, not only did their sin affect their *sitz em leben* but was also so extensive that all subsequent human descendants were born with a proclivity towards sin. The question is whether God's arranging of reality in such a way that the descendants of Adam and Eve could be so drastically affected by the actions of their ancestors. Such an objection is largely culturally conditioned. Since the Enlightenment, Westerners have placed an increasing emphasis upon the value of autonomy.²³ If God had adopted an Enlightenment-esque sort of communal yet individual existence where persons were insulated from the choices of others then one could make the argument that every person is existentially alone. No one could receive the merits of a savior. Every person would be his or her own savior. If one person's sin could not affect another person then neither love nor blessings could be transferable.²⁴ A world of insulation would be not

²² See, Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 537-540.

²³ Another stumbling block for many Westerners is the presupposition that the point of life is circumstantial happiness. If this is true and such a *telos* was by God's design then atheist and theist would be compelled by a basic kind of intellectual honesty that God has epically failed. A cursory reading of world history or a glimpse of the nightly news adds towards the cumulative case that the overwhelming majority of persons who have existed could not be considered as having lived happy lives, even by Aristotelian standards. William Lane Craig argues, "The chief purpose of life is not happiness, but the knowledge of God." Hence, to argue against the existence of God on the grounds of the existence suffering is to fundamentally misunderstand the point of life. William Lane Craig, "The Problem of Evil," *Reasonable Faith*, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-problem-of-evil>, Accessed July 12, 2012.

²⁴ See, William Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 14-26.

much unlike a world with human interaction but no meaningful relationships since human associations are grounded upon the exchangeability of affections.²⁵ Such a world would make the solitariness of Zen Buddhist meditation seem like a veritable frat party of intra-personal connections.

Yet, the New Testament presents a metanarrative of the restorative power in the death of Jesus as being able not only to restore but also to overcome the effects of one's inherited corrupted nature.²⁶ Hence, God not only allows for human freedom but the wholesale corruption of that freedom within the first generation of humanity and yet intersects the freefall of destruction with the offer of redemption and restoration. The offer of deliverance is not by proxy but through the intercession of God Himself who absorbs the full force of human depravity. N.T. Wright writes, "Or, as the old evangelistic tract put it, the nations of the world got together to pronounce judgment on God for all the evils of the world, only to realize with a shock that God had already served his sentence."²⁷ God cannot be charged with Stoic nonintervention because He, the Creator, suffered the penalty for the crimes of the creatures. Hence, evil exists because of God's sovereign creation of free creatures whose erring choices resulted in evil that God, in Christ, conquered through the substitutionary death of Christ and will ultimately be eradicated upon the return of Christ (Revelation 20-21). In closing, the existence of evil is an almost certain

²⁵ The charge could be made that I am equivocating between an inherited human nature on one hand and human interaction on the other. It is helpful to understand human nature post-Adam and Eve as the result of interaction with other persons and the revelation of God's nature. All post-Fall human interaction is still the same process. Taken together with the redemption offered through Jesus, the economy of human relationships is transformed from the inside out (Ephesians 1:7). Grace flowing from God, through Christ, to fallen persons within the sphere of the twisted human condition has the innate propensity for revolutionizing not only human relationships, but also human destiny (Matthew 5-7; John 3:16-21).

²⁶ Paul's argument in Romans 5:12-21 is as follows: A. Sin came through one person (5:12-13), B. Death came in the world through sin (5:14), C. Grace came through one person (5:15-16), D. True Life came through grace (5:17), E. Grace is stronger than sin (5:18-19), F. The Law made sin overwhelmingly sinful (5:20), G. Sin reigns in death (5:21), H. Grace reigns in Christ who gives eternal life (5:21).

²⁷ N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 94.

byproduct of a world of moral agents. It seems reasonable that God, being necessarily good, would create the best possible world. Hence, given the existence of the world, one can conclude that is the best possible world. Such a world carries with it, from the very beginning, the possibility of human moral agency being abused.

II. Why are there the types and kinds of evils that there are?

What is evil? What is good? If one adopts Augustine's definition of evil as "the privation of good [*privatio boni*]," then the types and kinds of evils would stem from an ultimate standard. Augustine writes, "Evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good [*amissio boni*] has received the name "evil."²⁸ G.E. Moore argues that goodness is a sort of intangible property.²⁹ If Augustine is correct and evil is a sort of deprivation of the good, then the rightful starting place of inquiry as to the "why" of the types and kinds of evil begin first with the standard of good; God Himself. An eminent scholar on the problem of evil argues, "The reason why it's legitimate to look at the good first is because good is origination but evil is derivative. By the very nature of it, evil is a bastardization of the good . . . What we are doing is going from the effect back to the cause."³⁰

²⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, xi. 9. In, John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 47. Hick raises an objection against the definition of evil as solely the privation of good. Hick writes, "To describe, for example, the dynamic malevolence behind the Nazi attempt to exterminate the European Jews as merely the absence of some good, is utterly insufficient." John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 56.

²⁹ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 175. Moore writes, "It is immediately obvious that when we see a thing to be good. Its goodness is not a property which we can take up in our hands or separate from it even by the most delicate scientific instruments and transfer to something else. It is not in fact like most of the predicates which we ascribe to things a *part* of the thing to which we ascribe it. But philosophers suppose that the reason why we cannot take goodness up and move it about is not that it is a different *kind* of object from any which can be moved about, but only that it *necessarily* exists together with anything with which it does exist."

³⁰ Dr. Ed Martin, "What is Evil and What is Good?" (Lecture, APOL 930 The Problem of Evil, Pain and Suffering, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, June 18-22, 2012).

Augustine’s “principle of plenitude” holds that God’s creativity is manifest in the plethora of variety found within the creation. Taken together with Augustine’s idea of God’s creativity as revealed in the wide variety found within creation, the various sorts and kinds of evil would also be as extensive. One example could be the juxtaposition of the fruit of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-23). Even a cursory look at love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control reveals potential evils if these virtues are turned on their heads. Cruelty is a corruption or a lack of kindness. If there were no standard such as kindness there could be no connotative or denotative definition of cruelty. Furthermore, virtues are person-dependent not in the sense of an individualized form of ethics, but in that a person must act in order for them to actually exist.

One way to address the question as to the existence of the plethora of types and kinds of evil is the power of the *Imago Dei*. Human creativity is certainly an aspect of the image of God.³¹ Humanity’s construction of massive edifices or breathtaking works of art seems to reflect the anthropological pattern of innate creativity.³² Just think of human achievements such as the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Sistine Chapel, Macchu Picchu, the Hubble Telescope, Macintosh computers, modern aeronautics, submarine technology, and Dr. Pepper. It is difficult

³¹ Andrew Schuman comments on J.R.R. Tolkien’s belief in human creativity as stemming from God, “Made in the image of the original Maker, Tolkien believed that humans have the ability to create new worlds by redistributing nouns and adjectives to introduce things such as the terrible blue moon, silver leaves, and rams with fleeces of gold. Even still, our secondary worlds remain rooted in the created reality that we know.” Andrew Schuman, “J.R.R. Tolkien and the Significance of Fairy-Story,” *The Dartmouth Apologia*, <http://www.dartmouthapologia.org/articles/show/81>, accessed July 24, 2012.

³² Rodney Stark writes, “What the great figures involved in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century blossoming of science—including Descartes, Galileo, Newton, and Kepler—did confess was their absolute faith in a creator God, whose work incorporated rational rules awaiting discovery. The rise of science was not an extension of classical learning. It was the natural outgrowth of Christian doctrine: nature exists because it was created by God. In order to love and honor God, it is necessary to fully appreciate the wonders of his handiwork. Because God is perfect, his handiwork functions in accord with *immutable principles*. By the full use of our God-given powers of reason and observation, it ought to be possible to discover these principles. These were the crucial ideas that explain why science arose in Christian Europe and nowhere else.” Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005), 22-23.

to take claims seriously that deny evidence of design in the universe.³³ Not only is there design within the universe but neither does one have to look far to find incredible diversity within the created order. God, being perfectly good, cannot be tempted by evil.³⁴ Yet, humans, although created in God's image, have the propensity to misuse an unrivalled level of intelligence and creativity not found elsewhere in the animal kingdom. For example, one needs look no further than the advance of science. Biological discoveries have produced cures to diseases as well as high tech germ warfare. Technological innovation has brought humanity to the place of lightning speed economic efficiency and the precipice of potential annihilation.³⁵

Such a picture meshes with a solidly biblical paradigm. Romans 1-3 pictures what one can expect when innate human creativity is abused. The ante-diluvian world (except for Noah and his family), had become so depraved that, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). The post-flood world has not fared much better. Descriptors such as, ἐφευρετὰς κακῶν (*inventors of evil things*), being unable to "sleep unless they have done wrong," are "robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble," and having, "a heart that devises wicked plans," carries the idea of a high level of depravity.³⁶

Matthew 12:34-35 reads, "*You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*"³⁵ *The good person out of his good*

³³ For more on the fine-tuning and design arguments, see, Stephen Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), William Lane Craig, "The Existence of God (Fine Tuning)," *Reasonable Faith Podcast*, June 18, 2007, and William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

³⁴ James 1:14-16.

³⁵ See, Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).

³⁶ Romans 1:30; Proverbs 4:16, 6:18.

treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” In outlining the true point of ritual washings in the Mosaic Law, Jesus claims:

Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? ¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone (Matthew 15:17-20).

According to Jesus, one’s spiritual heart condition is revealed by one’s words and actions. In the Bible, the heart is descriptive of the seat of the emotions or the essence of the person.³⁷ Several implications are evident from the biblical metanarrative. First, God sovereignly created humans as moral agents. Second, the types kinds of evil are foreseeable in any world where such agents exist. Third, the source of the problem of evil can be remedied through the grace of the Gospel of Christ. Fourth, God cannot be charged with either lacking oversight as to the future abuse of human agency from the point of creation or failure to intervene. In the cross, resurrection, and future glorification, evil has been absorbed and conquered by Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, John Hick argues for a “soul making” theodicy where evil and suffering are permitted by God in order to mature the souls of certain persons.³⁸ If the point of suffering is to “perfect” persons then the eschaton must play a vital part in any such theodicy. However, Hick’s “soul making” theodicy is precariously balanced on an obscure Irenaean reference that is certainly not definitively in support of Hick’s characterization of Irenaeus.

Hick’s paradigm seems not much unlike a cosmic training program wherein specific persons are

³⁷ Douglas R. Edwards explains, “The heart also represents the idea of volition and conscience (1 Sam. 24:5; 2 Sam. 24:10). The request for a pure heart is the desire for a new and more perfect conscience (Ps. 51:10; Matt. 5:8). Since the heart is the center for decisions (2 Sam. 7:21), obedience, devotion, and intentionality, it represents the total human person. Within the heart, human beings meet God’s word (1 Sam. 12:24; Jer. 32:40) and thus it is the location where conversion takes place (Ps. 51:10; Joel 2:12; Acts 2:37).” Douglas R. Edwards, “The Heart,” *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, ed., P.J. Achtemeier, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), in *Logos Library System* [CD-ROM].

³⁸ John Hick, “Soul-Making and Suffering,” *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, 188.

perfected through suffering.³⁹ While certain biblical texts certainly point to the benefits of suffering,⁴⁰ Hick's rejection of what he refers to as the "official Christian myth" in place of a purely "soul making" theodicy seems more of an abdication to the prevailing winds of scientism rather than an honest exegesis of Scripture.⁴¹

However, Hick does accurately portray "a central theme of Augustine's thought: the whole creation is good."⁴² Augustine establishes the paradigm of vice and virtue as, "Vice, too, is so contrary to nature, that it cannot but damage it. And therefore departure from God would be no vice, unless in a nature whose property it was to abide with God. So that even the wicked will is a strong proof of the goodness of the nature."⁴³ Hence, the abundance of beauty and goodness in the world provides for the possibility of abuse and hence, a cloak of many evils that could shroud the goodness of the created order.

III. Why is there the amount of evil that there is?

Why is evil distributed as it is? How is one to understand the duration, intensity, and magnitude of evil in connection with the existence of God? The post-Mackie debate has largely

³⁹ Irenaeus writes, "If, however, any one say, 'What then? Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from the beginning?' let him know that inasmuch as God is indeed always the same and unbegotten as respects Himself, all things are possible to Him. But created things must be inferior to Him who created them, from the very fact of their later origin; for it was not possible for things recently created to have been uncreated. But inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the perfect. Because, as these things are of later date, so are they infantile; so are they unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect discipline. For as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant, [but she does not do so], as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also it was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV. Xxxix.1. In, John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 212.

⁴⁰ Psalm 119:67, 71, 75; Hebrews 12:7-11; Romans 5:1-5; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.

⁴¹ John Hick, *Evil and the Love of Love*, 245-253.

⁴² *Ibid*, 45.

⁴³ Augustine, *City of God*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.XI.17.html>, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, accessed July 12, 2012.

accepted Plantinga's undercutting defeater against the charge of logical positivism in that the existence of God and evil are somehow logically incompatible. Now, the issue is what has become known as the problem of gratuitous evil. When considering the amount of alleged gratuitous or horrendous evil,⁴⁴ it is helpful to keep in mind Richard Swinburne's perspective of any amount of temporal suffering, "There is a limit of intensity and above all time (the length of a human life) to the suffering caused to any individual. In the perspective of eternity, the evils of this world are very limited in number and duration."⁴⁵ William L. Rowe gives the example of (E1) the fawn trapped in the forest fire and (E2) the "rape, beating, and murder by strangulation of a five-year old girl" by way of an inductive-deductive argument.⁴⁶ The argument is as follows:

P: No good we know of justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting E1 and E2;

therefore,

Q: no good at all justifies an omnipotent, omniscience, perfectly good being in permitting E1 and E2;

therefore,

Not G: there is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being.⁴⁷

Upon first glance, Rowe's claim appears to be a positive existential claim that gratuitous evil certainly exists. Hence, Rowe's argument is a factual claim. Greg Welty comments, "But in reality, it is a negative existential claim: there is no sufficient divine reason for permitting this case of suffering."⁴⁸ To argue for such a universal negative requires extensive epistemic

⁴⁴ Marilyn McCord Adams defines, "'horrendous evils' as 'evils the participation in (the doing of the suffering of) which gives one prima facie to doubt whether one's life could (given their inclusion to it) be a great good to one on the whole. Such reasonable doubt occurs because it is so difficult humanly to conceive how such evils could be overcome.'" Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *The Problem of Evil*, 211.

⁴⁵ Richard Swinburne, "Some Major Strands of Theodicy," *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder, 43.

⁴⁶ William L. Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," in *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder, 262.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 263.

⁴⁸ Dr. Greg Welty, "William Alston, 'The Inductive Argument From Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition,'" (Lecture, PHREL 4383-A, God and Evil, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, March, 2007).

grounding given the cognitive limitations of the human condition. Rowe even admits, “To be justified in such a claim one must be justified in excluding all the live possibilities for what the claim denies to exist.”⁴⁹ Yet, Rowe’s craftily stacks the deck in excluding religious experience from the total scope of human knowledge, which greatly shifts probability against theism in Baye’s Theorum.⁵⁰

The biblical answer is that if it were not for the forbearance of God, there would be far more evil in the world. For Jesus, the presupposition is of universal human depravity, not innocence, because all persons are deserving of death and it is only due to God’s mercy that any persons continue to live at all (Lk. 13:1-5). Therefore, according to Jesus, God is not the one being cross-examined but rather, it is humanity on the questioning stand (Lk. 13:6-9). Jesus’ point is that God’s forbearance holds back persons from being cut down in hopes that they will bear forth the fruit of repentance (Lk. 13:6-9). C.S. Lewis writes, “Pain is God’s megaphone to get our attention.”⁵¹ Once again, Christ experiencing the full amount of evil on the cross must play a central part in any answer to this question.⁵²

IV. Why is there the particular evils that there are?

The “why” of particular evils can be particularly difficult. Scripture identifies runaway desires as the flashpoint for the occurrence of particular evils. James 1:13-15 reads:

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is

⁴⁹ William L. Rowe, “The Evidential Argument from Evil” in *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder, 102.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 266.

⁵¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 133.

⁵² Isaiah 53:4-12.

lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

It is clear from this text that God does not tempt people to fall (although He may test them for faith), and that temptation and sin stem from “his own desire” (τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας). In Christian theology, the corruption of the natural order (natural evil), was introduced via moral evil. Having experienced the death of a brother to a rare type of soft tissue sarcoma illustrates the brutal reality of such evils. Why this and other instances of particular evils happen and why others do not (the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked), is the driving question of the Psalmist in Psalm 73. The cry of the Psalmist pivots on, “But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, ¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end” (Psalm 73:16-17). The rest of the Psalm points to the ultimate destruction of the wicked and the exaltation of the righteous. Deliverance of believers in the eschaton will contain such closeness with God that all past suffering of particular evils will be enveloped in eternal love. Hence, the answer once again goes back to human depravity which falls under the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God, all of which must be understood through the lenses of the redemptive death of Christ.

V. Why does God allow moral evils, and, natural evils, as He does?

The refrain of the Hebrew prophets could be often summarized as, “How long O Lord?” A consistent theme in this paper has been the sovereignty of God. Even seemingly gratuitous evil is not outside the scope of God’s knowledge or power. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude “*all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28). Such a premise is widely accepted within most Christian circles.⁵³ However, for

⁵³ Open theists such as John Sanders would disagree that God knows and causally interacts in the future. Sanders argues that God has a tremendous amount of data but is essentially learning about the future. Yet Sanders also holds that such a state of affairs stems from God’s sovereign action to arrange reality in this manner. See, John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

unbelievers, this is dangerously close to the precipice of blind faith. Are there any data demonstrating God's love, power, and knowledge or must one merely relegate such questions to an existential leap of faith without or in the face of evidence? N.T. Wright writes, "What the Gospels offer is not a philosophical explanation of evil, what it is or why it's there, nor a set of suggestions for how we might adjust our lifestyles so that evil will mysteriously disappear from the world, but the story of an *event* in which the living God *deals with it*."⁵⁴ William Lane Craig paraphrases Pascal's two-pronged apologetic as, "Knowledge of God without knowledge of man's wretchedness begets pride, and knowledge of man's wretchedness without knowledge of God begets despair, but knowledge of Jesus Christ furnishes man knowledge of both simultaneously."⁵⁵ So, if God has already dealt with the penalty of evil then why does evil continue to exist? God allows certain moral and natural evils as incentives to repentance. Given universal depravity, God would be justified in applying universal justice, which would be separation from God forever in hell. Yet, God in His mercy, allows for persons to have "borrowed time" in order to come to repentance. Persons must come to realize, "The "problem of evil" is not simply or purely a "cosmic" thing; it is also a problem *about me*."⁵⁶

First, one should realize that this question is presuppositionally forged, as are all questions. According to Jesus, God is not the one on trial.

Second, one should properly understand the limits of human epistemic access to the necessary data in order to definitively charge God with wrongdoing in the allowance of certain moral and natural evils. Third, one must understand the implications of the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ in relation to the problem of evil. Gale Webbe writes, "The only

⁵⁴ N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*, 93.

⁵⁵ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 66.

⁵⁶ N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*, 97.

ultimate way to conquer evil is to let it be smothered within a willing, living, human being. When it is absorbed there, like blood in a sponge or a spear thrown into one's heart, it loses its power and goes no further."⁵⁷ In Christ, the penalty for evil is paid and the power of evil is overcome. Hence, Paul's charge,

No, in all these things [experiencing evils that may seem gratuitous] we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37-39).

Through Him we triumph.

⁵⁷ Gale D. Webbe, *The Night and Nothing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), np. In, Philip Yancey, *Disappointed With God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 129.

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