

THE TOUGH-LOVE PROPOSAL: A NOVEL THEODICY

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A doctoral thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the

DEPARTMENT OF SYSTEMATIC AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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June 2020

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis, that this is my own original work and that no part of this thesis has been published, submitted for publication, or submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution. Where other people's work has been used, this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with academic and departmental requirements.

Signature Le P Uai

Date: June 3, 2020

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Jerry Pillay, for his valuable support and guidance in the writing of this dissertation.

I would also like to thank my wife, Vickie, and my children, Daniel and Joshua for their love, patience, and encouragement during the process of completing this work.

## SUMMARY

In this study, we reviewed the literature concerning the problem(s) of evil and found that, while there is a consensus that the logical problem of evil as raised by J. L. Mackie has been successfully addressed by Alvin Plantinga's "Free Will Defense," the evidential problem of evil as argued by William Rowe has yet to be resolved. The various solutions suggested by recognized scholars (e.g., John Hick and Richard Swinburne) have not met with broad acceptance. Most of the efforts to resolve the problem have been focused on Rowe's factual premise (i.e., there are gratuitous evils). This approach has been fraught with difficulties and uncertainties as the determination of "gratuitousness" may be "beyond our ken."

Instead, this research aims to challenge Rowe's theological premise (i.e., God prevents all gratuitous evils) by supplying a morally justifying reason (i.e., "tough-love) for God to exist in the presence of evil (gratuitous or otherwise). We also endeavor to stay within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy in affirming that God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and the omnibenevolent creator of the universe.

As Rowe insisted on keeping the discussion within the narrow confines of Restricted Standard Theism (i.e., an Omnigod creator without other religious claims), in the section for non-theists, we introduce a "Tough-love Proposal" that does not rely on biblical or religious literature. As humans deny God's existence, God lets them go their own way (resulting in good and evil) and in "tough love," waits patiently for them to respond to his message of salvation as proclaimed by the Church and the Holy Spirit. The evils in this world (gratuitous, excessive, horrendous . . .) are strictly the results of people living independently from God. Rowe's argument that the presence of "gratuitous" evils makes God's existence improbable is answered

by the commonsense notion of “tough love” as often used in the restoration of broken relationships. The numerous requirements advocated by scholars for a “successful” theodicy are shown to be met by the “Tough-love Proposal,” using findings from other fields of knowledge (e.g., economics, psychology . . .).

As God does not act in the same way toward believers and non-believers, in the section for theists, following the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics (i.e., interpretation using lexical data, grammatical data, historical and cultural backgrounds, near and broader contexts), we apply Christian Scriptures and show that God promises that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28), thus negating the possibility of gratuitous evils in (faithful) believers’ lives. The question raised by theists and non-theists concerning the creation of humans with “free will and no possibility of sinning” is answered by the “simplicity” of God, logically preventing him from creating a creature sharing the divine impeccability.

Additionally, we propose some theories concerning the “world of death” (i.e., our world with the “survival of the fittest”) and the world of life (i.e., a new heaven and a new earth). In God’s sovereignty, we are free to choose the world/path that we desire.

#### Ten key terms

The problem of evil, Rowe’s “Evidential argument from evil,” Rowe’s factual premise, Rowe’s theological premise, the “Tough-love Proposal,” “gratuitous” evils, a novel theodicy, historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics, world of death, and world of life.

## CHAPTER ONE

### OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

Dr. Peter Kreeft maintained that “the problem of evil is the most serious problem in the world. It is also the one serious objection to the existence of God.”<sup>1</sup> The “problem of evil” is more accurately a family of problems (e.g., logical, evidential, existential, aporetic) dating back to antiquity (Plato 429–347 BC, Epicurus 341–270 BC).<sup>2</sup> It can be approached by first *assuming* God’s existence and then endeavoring to explain the presence of evil in the world (i.e., “the aporetic problem of evil”).<sup>3</sup> This was the standard method used through most of Christianity’s history. Irenaeus (ca. 130–202) proposed character building<sup>4</sup> as the reason why a good God would allow evil in the world. Augustine (ca. 354–430) argued against the “dualistic threat” of the Manicheans who advocated the presence of an evil essence in opposition to the omnibenevolent God. Augustine claimed that human free will was the reason for the existence of evil.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, he was unable to successfully counter the assertion that God is the ultimate

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, 54.

<sup>2</sup> “He (God) alone is responsible for the good things, but we must find some other cause for the bad ones, not a god.” Plato, *Plato: Complete Works*, 1018. David Hume quoted Epicurus in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 196.

<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Adams and Robert Adams (eds.), *The Problem of Evil*, 2–3.

<sup>4</sup> Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, chapter 12.

<sup>5</sup> “Perverted will is the cause of evil, and it is useless to look further.” Augustine, *The Problem of Free Choice*, 189. Later in life, Augustine wrote: “God works in the hearts of human beings to incline their wills to whatever he wills, whether to good actions in accord with his mercy or to evil ones in accord with their merits.” Augustine, “Grace and Free Choice,” 102. This is not to say that Augustine became a theological determinist. Dr. Couenhoven observed: “Augustine thus resists commitment to a more thoroughgoing divine determinism. He always emphasizes that, though God is the giver of all power of achievement, God does not ordain all acts of will.” Jesse Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 101.

author of evil as free will was given to humans by God.<sup>6</sup> The existence of an omnibenevolent creator was also assumed by Thomas Aquinas who taught that “evil is the absence of the good,”<sup>7</sup> and that “the evil which consists in defect of action, or which is caused by defect of the agent, is not reduced to God as to its cause.”<sup>8</sup> In the Reformation and Counter-Reformation periods, Christians (e.g., Luther, Calvin, Arminius) never doubted the existence of a good and omnipotent Lord while they endeavored to provide plausible explanations for the existence of evil. Sadly, the age-old assumption of God’s existence faltered in the Early Modern period.

The use of evil as an argument against the existence of God can be traced to David Hume (1711–1776). In his *Dialogues* published posthumously, Hume, using the voice of Philo, said:

*“There may four hypotheses be framed concerning the first causes of the universe: that they are endowed with perfect goodness; that they have perfect malice; that they are opposite and have both goodness and malice; that they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the two former unmixed principles; and the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seem to oppose the third. The fourth, therefore, seems by far the most probable.”*<sup>9</sup>

Thus, according to Hume, the omnibenevolent God of yesteryear may not exist for a being with “neither goodness nor malice . . . seems by far the most probable.” This was a radical deviation from previous lines of thoughts concerning the orthodox God who was described as a loving father caring for his creation and his creatures, providing them with good things (Matthew 6:25–34), and protecting them from evil (2 Thessalonians 3:3). This fundamental disbelief in

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Kane averred: “To ground a denial that God directly created evil on the theory of the nature of evil as privation looks very much like a tour de force of definition.” G. Stanley Kane, “Evil and Privation.” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11 (1980), 55.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. 1.49.1

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. 1.49.2

<sup>9</sup> David Hume. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 114.

God's existence was carried even further by Dr. J. L. Mackie who claimed in his "Logical Argument from Evil" that "it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively *irrational*, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrines are *inconsistent* with one another (emphases mine)."<sup>10</sup> Christian theists are thus "irrational" in continuing to cling to the belief of the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator.<sup>11</sup> In his well-known "Free Will Defense," Dr. Alvin Plantinga, following Augustine's footsteps, was able to refute Mackie's argument by showing several flaws in the "Logical Argument from Evil." Not to be deterred, non-theists came up with a more refined argument against the existence of an Omnigod (i.e., omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator). Dr. William Rowe developed a sophisticated "Evidential Argument from Evil" aimed to disprove God's existence in the presence of "gratuitous evils," evils that bring no "greater good" or that do not prevent "worse evils."<sup>12</sup> William Rowe's argument rests on the truths (or the probable truths) of two premises. First, gratuitous evils exist (the "Factual Premise"). Second, the Omnigod prevents all gratuitous evils (the "Theological Premise"). William Rowe also insisted on the use of Restricted Standard Theism (i.e., standard theism without other independent religious claims like the Bible).<sup>13</sup>

Christian philosophers and theologians have devised many innovative answers to Rowe's "evidential argument from evil." Dr. John Hick, following the lead of Irenaeus, proposed a "Soul-Making Theodicy," seeing evil as the means to a perfection "lying before us in the future,

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<sup>10</sup> J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 200.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Crenshaw observed: "As long as there were multiple deities, evil could readily be attributed to one or several of them with little harm to the total worldview. The emergence of belief in only one god who is both good and powerful brought an attendant problem: explaining evil." James Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil*, 54.

<sup>12</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil," 335–41.

<sup>13</sup> William Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," footnote 16, 240.



at the end of a lengthy and arduous process of further creation through time.”<sup>14</sup> Hick’s theodicy has been subjected to severe criticisms including Rowe’s counterargument “that evil occurs far in excess of what an omnipotent being would have to permit for soul-making.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the need for universal salvation in Hick’s theodicy is contrary to most orthodox understanding of the subject.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Richard Swinburne advocated a “Serious Free Will Theodicy,”<sup>17</sup> claiming that the exercise of free will to accomplish great goods (e.g., Mother Teresa) or to commit great evils (e.g., Hitler) is extremely valuable, and that the positive value of the goods outweighs all the evils in the world. Non-theists begged to differ. Dr. Paul Draper wrote: “I don’t believe it is possible for Swinburne to show in any rigorous way that this criterion is satisfied in respect of all the world’s evils.”<sup>18</sup> Alvin Plantinga introduced the “Felix Culpa Theodicy,” asserting that the Fall of humans (and the subsequent evils) is a “happy fault” (Felix Culpa in Latin) as it is a necessary condition for the “great good” of the “incarnation and atonement.”<sup>19</sup> However, Dr. Kevin Diller disagreed as “the incarnation alone does not require suffering and evil, so neither then is evil required for enhancing the intimacy of human relationship with God.”<sup>20</sup> Other theodicies, advanced by various theists to rebut Rowe’s argument and show that every evil lead to some “greater good,”<sup>21</sup> have met with the same difficulties. This situation has led to the development of a “stalemate tactic,”<sup>22</sup> the proposal advanced by “Skeptical Theists” that “if God

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<sup>14</sup> John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> William Rowe, “Paradox and Promise,” 120.

<sup>16</sup> Robin Perry and Christopher Partridge, eds. *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Draper, “Review: Providence and the Problem of Evil by Richard Swinburne,” 466.

<sup>19</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 363–89.

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Diller, “Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good World?” 403.

<sup>21</sup> “Greater goods” can also include the “prevention of worse evils.”

<sup>22</sup> “The nature of the problem makes it impossible for any theist to show that all actual evil is justified. But it is also true that the nature of these problems makes it impossible for non-theists to show that actual evil is not justified.” M. B. Ahern, *The Problem of Evil*, 72.

does exist, we humans should not expect to see or grasp very much of this God's purposes,"<sup>23</sup> thus rendering Rowe's claim that there are gratuitous evils impossible to ascertain. While this approach helps "avoid the definite refutation of theism,"<sup>24</sup> the claim of "ignorance" does nothing to counter Rowe's argument that gratuitous evil *lowers the probability* of God's existence. These theodicies and defenses are all aimed to disprove Rowe's Factual Premise that there are gratuitous evils in the world (e.g., the Holocaust). Many theists<sup>25</sup> (myself included) do not believe that this is a fruitful approach as it is exceedingly difficult (if not impossible) to prove that every evil in the world must lead to some "greater good" (i.e., not gratuitous).

A more promising path may be to challenge Rowe's Theological Premise (i.e., the Omnigod prevents all gratuitous evils). Such an attempt has been made by Open Theists. Dr. William Hasker asserts "that much of the future is known by God as what *might happen*, and as what *will probably happen*, but not as what *will definitely* take place (emphases in original)."<sup>26</sup> Thus, God is not responsible for the gratuitous evils occurring in the world since he does not know (and does not control) the future. Unfortunately, this view of God's limited omniscience and omnipotence runs counter to most orthodox understandings of God's attributes.<sup>27</sup>

Our work will be to formulate a *novel theodicy* that would provide a morally justifying reason for God (with unlimited omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence) to allow evils in this world. This research project will provide a rebuttal to Rowe's evidential argument from evil, namely his Theological Premise. In the broader context, the approach will also resolve

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Wysktra, "A Skeptical Theist View," 109.

<sup>24</sup> Joel T. Tierno, "On Defense as Opposed to Theodicy," 167.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Peterson, "Christian Theism and the Evidential Argument from Evil." Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War*. William Hasker, "An Adequate God."

<sup>26</sup> William Hasker, "An Open Theist View," 60.

<sup>27</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*.

Epicurus' age-old question as to how an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being can exist with evil. The proposal will endeavor to meet the many requirements advocated by philosophers and theologians for a theodicy: logical consistency, relevancy to the problem, relevancy to the theology, value claim, impossibility claim, commonsensical views about the world, widely accepted scientific and historical views, intuitively plausible moral principles, and Rowe's requirement for a solution to the "four problems of evil." Furthermore, the proposed theodicy must stay within the boundaries of orthodox Christianity, affirming the standard attributes of a benevolent creator.

## **1.2. The Research Problem**

Rowe's "Evidential Argument from Evil" consists of two premises, the "Factual Premise" (i.e., there are gratuitous evils) and the "Theological Premise" (i.e., if God exists, there are no gratuitous evils), leading to the conclusion (i.e., God does not exist). Since the argument is valid (a modus tollens), critics need to show that one (or both) of the premises is not necessarily true.

Most theologians and philosophers have raised issues with the Factual Premise, endeavoring to show that there are no gratuitous evils in the world. This has been an insurmountable task as few reasonable people would accept the thesis that horrendous evils (e.g., genocides) can lead to some "ultimate good." Attempts to undermine the Theological Premise and prove that an Omnigod can exist with gratuitous evils (e.g., Open Theism) have also fallen short.

Thus, there is an urgent need to resolve Rowe's argument from evil against the existence of God. The following research questions need to be addressed in the proposed theodicy.

1. Can an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God exist with evil (gratuitous or otherwise)?
2. What is a morally justifying reason (or reasons) for the Omnigod to allow gratuitous evil?
3. Why did the Omnigod allow the presence of evil?

A resolution of these issues will provide a cogent answer for the overall research question of the possible existence of an omnibenevolent creator in the pervasive presence of evil. This dissertation sits squarely in the area of "systematic and historical theology" as it endeavors to trace the historical development of the problem of the existence of a benevolent God and horrendous evils, namely the older logical problem of evil and the contemporary evidential problem of evil. Although there is a great volume of literature on the subject under research, the present project will provide a theodicy to rebut Rowe's Theological Premise from the perspective of a theological and orthodox understanding of a divine creator with unrestricted omnipotence, unlimited omniscience, and boundless benevolence. In this way, it would offer a unique and distinct contribution to existing debates on the theme.

### **1.3 Research Objectives.**

The goal of this research project is to present *a novel theodicy*, a satisfactory answer to Rowe's evidential argument from evil. The study has the following sub-objectives.

1. To defend the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God in the presence of "gratuitous" evil.

2. To suggest a probable reason (a morally justifying reason) for the existence of horrendous and “gratuitous” evils in the world.
3. To show that humans are responsible for the evils (“gratuitous” or otherwise) in this realm.
4. To provide a satisfactory answer to Rowe’s evidential argument from evil.
5. To meet the requirements of a “successful” theodicy.
6. To present a rationale for God’s creation of an imperfect human capable of committing evils.
7. To explain that God deals differently with theists versus non-theists.
8. To clarify the sources of moral and natural evils (e.g., from God or humans).
9. To propose a way for believers to attain “union with God.”

The findings of this research will help resolve issues that have plagued humankind since time immemorial (e.g., If God is good, why is there evil? Who is responsible for the innumerable evils in this world? God or people?). On a more practical level, this project will encourage humans to acknowledge God’s existence and realize that the horrendous evils they experience are what they brought on themselves. They can then decide to take the way of escape/salvation provided by their creator through the redeemer, Jesus the Messiah. Non-theists can use this proposal to reevaluate their own beliefs concerning the existence of a benevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient God in the presence of evil in the world. Theists can be strengthened in their conviction that a benevolent God can use “evils” to bring out good for his children (Romans 8:28).

#### **1.4 Research Methodology.**

The research methods will include a broad literature review and the use of logical principles to formulate an argument for the existence of God and evil (gratuitous or otherwise). Support for the premises of the argument will be drawn from findings in other fields of knowledge. “Tough love,” the main thesis of the proposal, has been used in many cultures, eastern as well as western, in child rearing, in social work, in economics, in criminal justice, in the field of altruism, in organizational management and government, in psychology, in education, as well as in various religions (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism). Case studies illustrating some salient points will be used to “flesh out” concepts (e.g., moral and natural evils) and support the overall argument (e.g., The case of the Prodigal Son will be discussed to support the argument for “tough-love”). The notion of “gratuitous” moral evil is exemplified in the account of the wanton murders of innocent passersby under the bloody reign of General Idi Amin in Uganda. The heartbreaking experience of a Hurricane Katrina survivor personifies the tangled relationship between natural and moral evils. Furthermore, the previous case studies used by theists and non-theists to support or disprove the existence of God (e.g., the rape and murder of five-year-old “Sue,” the fiery death of “Bambi”) will be addressed, with an eye toward a resolution in this novel theodicy. Thus, case studies are an integral part of our research methodology as they are used to illustrate new theories (e.g., the case study of Chuck Colson elucidates the theory that “tough love” is a morally justifying reason for God to exist in the presence of evil), to gain a better understanding of the problem (e.g., the case study of the Khmer Rouge genocide serves as a real life example of horrendous moral evils), and to support arguments made in our research project (e.g., The case study of Ludwig Boltzmann is used to support the proposition that “God, if he exists, disapproves of humans claiming that God does not exist”).

Since the first section of the project is aimed at answering the concerns of non-theists like Rowe and his supporters (who insist on Restricted Standard Theism), no religious material will be used.

The second section of the work will address the questions raised by Christian theists. Besides the data gathered from other fields of knowledge (e.g., social sciences, medicine, philosophy), Christian Scriptures will be used, following the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics.

Dr. Gordon Fee described the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics as: “The questions of content are basically four kinds: textual criticism (the determination of the actual wording of the author), lexical data (the meaning of words), grammatical data (the relationship of words to one another), and historical-cultural background (the relationship of words and ideas to the background and culture of the author and his readers).”<sup>28</sup> While textual criticism is beyond the scope of this project, we will endeavor to determine the meanings of the Scriptural passages as the original author intended for the readers. The biblical data are taken to be historically accurate and to reflect the cultures at the time of their composition. Words are taken in their usual meanings and usage.

Dr. David Cooper advocates: “Take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.”<sup>29</sup> Normal rules of grammar apply in the interpretation of the Scriptures, while recognizing the different genres of the texts (e.g., gospel, poetry, epistle). The near context of a verse (e.g., chapter) as well the broader context (e.g., the whole gospel of John) must be evaluated prior to interpretation. Unclear Scriptures

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<sup>28</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> David Cooper, *The World's Greatest Library*, 11.

must be seen in the light of clearer passages (e.g., baptism for the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:29 in the light of judgment of the dead in Hebrews 9:27). As revelation is progressive (e.g., Old Testament laws followed by New Testament teachings), hermeneutical approaches need to be cognizant of the evolving cultures, languages, and contexts of the biblical writings. Finally, the historical-grammatical method, as espoused by many Christians,<sup>30</sup> endeavors to apply the original meaning of Scriptures into the present-day context, a practical application of biblical concepts into believers' lives.

For example, Romans 8:28 stated: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." Paul was the accepted author of the epistle.<sup>31</sup> He supposedly wrote the letter from Corinth to Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, around 57 AD.<sup>32</sup> The cultural milieu was first-century Roman society with Jewish and Greek undertones. The broader context of Romans 8:28 was the presentation of the Gospel, the good news that the righteousness of God is imparted to humans through faith in Christ in the New Testament (rather than by works of the Old Testament Law), resulting in their adoptions into the family of God. The nearer context addressed the "sufferings of the present time,"<sup>33</sup> necessitating Paul's words of comfort and encouragement that all things "work together for good." The Greek word "Panta" translated "all" means "all in the sense of each (every) part that applies."<sup>34</sup> Evils, pains, and sufferings are all for the good, *not of every one*

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<sup>30</sup> Dr. Sexton observed: "The historical-grammatical method is the established hermeneutical method of evangelicals." Jason Sexton, "Emerging Church Hermeneutics and the Historical-Grammatical Method," 158. See Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*. Also see Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. The "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" signed by noted evangelicals declared: "We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture." Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy*, 497.

<sup>31</sup> John Witmer, "Romans," 435.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 435–36.

<sup>33</sup> Romans 8:18

<sup>34</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/3956.htm>



(as shown by the grammatical construction), but of those who love God, of those who are called according to his purpose. This teaching of “evil resulting in good” is also supported by other Scriptures (e.g., James 1:2–4, 1 Peter 1:6). The practical application of Romans 8:28 in the twenty-first-century church can be an encouragement for believers to be faithful in the face of pains, sufferings, and evils.

### **1.5 Delimitations of Study.**

Since the problem(s) of evil is quite extensive and of long duration, we will not trace its detailed history over the centuries. We will instead limit ourselves to the relevant historical facts and the more recent scholarship advanced by well-known scholars. We will not interact with the logical problem (besides a quick review as background knowledge) or existential problem of evil, interesting as they are. Due to space constraints, we are also unable to address other evidential arguments from evil besides Rowe’s proposal (e.g., Draper’s indirect inductive approach,<sup>35</sup> Tooley’s Carnapian construction).<sup>36</sup> We can only mention the most prominent theodicies (e.g., Plantinga’s, Hick’s and Swinburne’s works) in this dissertation. We will give the barest acknowledgments to the other interesting scholarly attempts (e.g., Marilyn McCord Adams’ “aesthetic approach,”<sup>37</sup> Stump’s “union with God,”<sup>38</sup> or Oord’s “essential kenosis”).<sup>39</sup>

### **1.6 Conclusion.**

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Draper, “Pain and Pleasure,” 331–50.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Tooley, “Inductive Logic and the Probability that God Exists,” 144–64.

<sup>37</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*.

<sup>38</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God*.

This project is strictly aimed at providing a *novel theodicy* to answer Rowe’s “Argument from Evil,” namely his “Theological Premise,” by supplying a morally justifying reason (i.e., tough love) for God to exist with evil (gratuitous or otherwise). According to Dr. Hasker, it is unwise “for the theodicy to claim that the reason given is the actual reason God has permitted the evil.”<sup>40</sup> We agree and therefore will not claim that “tough-love” is God’s actual reason. Rather, it is a very probable reason for the existence of evil in this fallen realm.

In the next chapter, we will review the current literature on the logical and evidential arguments from evil. We will point out the weaknesses and shortcomings of the major defenses and theodicies by well-known scholars, thus necessitating a new approach to answer Rowe’s “Theological Premise” challenge.

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<sup>40</sup> William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 61.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction.

This chapter will review some of the literature on this research topic concerning the logical and evidential problems of evil. To avoid confusion and facilitate discussion, we will start by defining some important terms that can be used for the rest of the proposal (e.g., moral evil, natural evil, and suffering). We will then briefly trace the history of the logical problem of evil as raised by Epicurus,<sup>1</sup> Hume,<sup>2</sup> and more recently by Dr. J. L. Mackie.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Plantinga's "Free Will Defense"<sup>4</sup> will be presented as a possible answer to the dilemma. However, this "defense" is ineffective against the contemporary formulation of the problem, the "Evidential Argument from Evil," as proposed by Dr. William Rowe.<sup>5</sup> Other defenses and theodicies have been proposed by many recognized scholars (e.g., Dr. Stephen Wykstra's "Skeptical Theism Defense,"<sup>6</sup> Dr. John Hick's "Soul Making Theodicy,"<sup>7</sup> Dr. Richard Swinburne's "Serious Free Will Theodicy").<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, all the attempts have met with various legitimate and persuasive criticisms exposing some major weaknesses of the theories. As a result, none has garnered any widespread support, thus justifying the current project to search for a new solution to Rowe's "Evidential

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<sup>1</sup> According to Dr. Hickson, as there is no extant Epicurean work concerning Epicurus' "riddle" on the problem of evil, the source "was chapter 13 of *On Anger* by the ancient (240–320) church Father Lactantius." Michael Hickson, "A Brief History of Problems of Evil," 6.

<sup>2</sup> David Hume. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 114.

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 200.

<sup>4</sup> Alvin Plantinga. *God, Freedom, and Evil*.

<sup>5</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," 336.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Wusktra, "A Skeptical Theist View," 109.

<sup>7</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*.

Problem of Evil” and fill a research gap in the extensive philosophical and theological endeavors.

## 2.2 Definitions of Terms.

“Evil is not an easy term to define in a precise and comprehensive manner.”<sup>9</sup> Some scientists even claimed that evil does not exist.<sup>10</sup> David Hume acknowledged the presence of evil: “Were a stranger to drop, on a sudden, into this world, I would show him, as a specimen of its ills, a hospital full of diseases, a prison crowded with malefactors and debtors, a field of battle strewn with carcasses, a fleet foundering in the ocean, a nation languishing under tyranny, famine or pestilence.”<sup>11</sup>

Plato maintained that “no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death.”<sup>12</sup> Mark Twain quipped that “the lack of money is the root of all evil.”<sup>13</sup> Solzhenitsyn argued that “the battle line between good and evil runs through the heart of every man [sic].”<sup>14</sup> Setting aside these musings, we have chosen to use the definitions of eight scholars (theologians and philosophers) to craft a “master” statement of evil. This will help us appreciate the many varied perceptions of the concept of “evil” by different scholars in this literature review of the problem.

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<sup>9</sup> Meister and Dew, eds. *God and the Problem of Evil*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, “The End of Evil?”

[http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/the\\_spectator/2011/09/does\\_evil\\_exist\\_neuroscientists\\_say\\_no\\_.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/the_spectator/2011/09/does_evil_exist_neuroscientists_say_no_.html)

<sup>11</sup> David Hume, *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, 76.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/evil>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

### 2.2.1 Definition of Evil.

Augustine declared, “When, however a thing is corrupted, its corruption is an evil because it is, by just so much, a privation<sup>15</sup> of the good.”<sup>16</sup> Benedict de Spinoza explained: “By evil . . . I understand that which we certainly know hinders us from possessing anything that is good.”<sup>17</sup> Immanuel Kant opined: “Since the will can be appraised as good or evil by means of its maxims, this propensity to evil must consist in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxims from moral law.”<sup>18</sup> Dr. R. C. Sproul wrote: “Evil is always defined as an action, an action that fails to meet a standard of goodness.”<sup>19</sup> Dr. Daniel Speak stated: “The word ‘evil’ doesn’t apply only to particularly heinous or intensely morally disturbing events. The problem of evil . . . could also be called the problem of bad things, since it is the occurrence of anything less than good.”<sup>20</sup> Dr. Daniel Haybron maintained: “To be evil is . . . to be consistently vicious in the following sense: one is not aligned with the good to a morally significant extent.”<sup>21</sup> Dr. John Kekes added: “Evil involves serious harm that causes fatal or lasting physical injury, as do, for instance, murder, torture and mutilation. Serious harm need not be physical.”<sup>22</sup> Dr. Peter Kreeft affirmed: “Evil is not a thing but a wrong choice, or the damage done by a wrong choice.”<sup>23</sup> A “master” definition of evil can be as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> Augustine (354–430 AD) followed Aristotle (384–322 BC) and Plotinus (204–270 AD). “We maintain that a thing may ‘come to be from what is not’—that is, in a qualified sense. For a thing comes to be from the privation, which in its own nature is not-being.” Aristotle, *Physics*, I.8. “If evil exists at all, that it be situate in the realm of Non-Being, that it be some mode, as it were, of the Non-Being.” Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.8.3.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*. IV.12.

<sup>17</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, 190.

<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> R. C. Sproul, <https://www.christianity.com/theology/the-mystery-of-evil-11596412.html>

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Haybron, “Moral Monsters and Saints,” 269.

<sup>22</sup> John Kekes, *The Roots of Evil*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, 54.

*Evil is a privation of the good, a deviation from moral law, a hindrance from possessing anything that is good, a wrong choice and an action that fails to meet a standard of goodness. Evil is the occurrence of anything less than good and involves serious harm that causes fatal or lasting physical and non-physical injury.*<sup>24</sup>

Evil can be subdivided into three types: moral, natural, and social.

### *2.2.2 Definition of Moral Evil.*

“*Moral evils* are those evils that are in some sense the result of a person who is morally blameworthy of the resultant evil.”<sup>25</sup> Examples of moral evils include genocides, child abuses, thefts, lies, rapes . . . Moral evils may not be actual deeds (e.g., a murder) as an intent to commit the wrongdoing (e.g., soliciting a murder-for-hire from an undercover policeman) is still considered a crime. Moral evils can be intentional (e.g., a premeditated assault with a baseball bat) or unintentional (e.g., injuries from foul balls). They can be caused by one’s own action (e.g., death from texting while driving) or someone else’s action (e.g., killed by a drunk driver). They can be individual (e.g., theft) or corporate (e.g., insurance fraud by a company). They can be categorized by quantity (e.g., number of homicides per year) or severity (e.g., injury levels). They can be deemed gratuitous (i.e., with no redeeming good) or non-gratuitous (i.e., with some redeeming good).

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<sup>24</sup> There are other definitions of evil. The definition used here is helpful for our purpose of discussing the problem of evil and the existence of God.

<sup>25</sup> Chad Meister and James Dew, eds. *God and the Problem of Evil*, 3.

Dr. Stephen Wykstra wrote: “Philosophers, I once heard Nicholas Wolterstorff say, should tell more stories.”<sup>26</sup> Here is one from Uganda, Africa. Under the military rule of General Idi Amin, 300,000 to 500,000 people were murdered for ethnic, political, or financial reasons. Soldiers casually grabbed and killed innocent people in broad daylight. Witnesses dared not intervene for fear of losing their own lives. Pastor Kefa Sempangi described his dreadful experience:

*“The soldiers were kicking him from every side, and I could hear their heavy boots crunching against his flesh. They laughed and cursed as the man groaned, rolling from side to side. He was barely conscious . . . The soldiers were only machines. They were nothing to me and I was nothing to them . . . In that moment I learned a new truth. I learned that just as there is a boundary beyond which human beings cannot comprehend the glory of God, so there is a boundary beyond which they cannot comprehend the evil in the world. There is a boundary beyond which everything is a senseless chasm. It is here in the nightmare of utter chaos that human feeling dies. It is here, where death and terror seem to have full dominion, that even the deepest of human sorrows becomes but a distant grief.”<sup>27</sup>*

Sadly, moral evils are not the only curses we encounter in this wretched world! Nature also seems to conspire against us, unleashing devastating earthquakes and tsunamis, blotting out the innocent as well as the guilty.

### 2.2.3 Definition of Natural Evil.

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Wykstra, “A Skeptical Theist View,” 99.

<sup>27</sup> F. Kefa Sempangi, *A Distant Grief*, 112–14.

“Natural evil is evil that results from the operation of natural processes, in which case no human being can be held morally accountable for the resultant evil.”<sup>28</sup> Examples of natural evils include hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, diseases . . . However, hurricanes that appear in the middle of the ocean with no live beings around to be harmed cannot be considered natural evils. Earthquakes in the middle of the uninhabited Antarctica are not natural evils. “These events are not in themselves evil but take on the label of being evil when they cause human or animal suffering.”<sup>29</sup>

According to Dr. John Feinberg, natural evils can be further subdivided into natural “evils that result from specific acts of moral evil” (i.e., “attached” natural evils) and those which “are not direct results of any specific act of moral evil”<sup>30</sup> (i.e., “unattached” natural evils). Thus, deaths from a cheap, flimsy, not-up-to-code building’s collapse in an earthquake are “attached” natural evils as they are “attached” to specific acts of moral evil (e.g., greed in skimping on construction costs). Deaths from careless forest fires (e.g., campfires left unattended) are “attached” natural evils as they are the result of callous disregards for safety. Deaths from lightning-caused forest fires are “unattached” natural evils. Some evils can also be a combination of natural and moral evils.

Andre, a survivor of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, sadly recounted his experience of horrific natural and moral evils:

*“Nothing to do, no food, no water, no blankets, but I figured somebody would come directly.*

*They wouldn’t just leave us there, no sir. But they did, they left us. Then they up and forgot us,*

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<sup>28</sup> Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil,” section 1b.

<sup>29</sup> Jeremy Evans, *The Problem of Evil*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 146.



*and that's when things started to get bad. Really bad . . . Then in the morning, it happened. Some kid, maybe eight years old, climbed up on the overpass railing, and as soon as he got to the top, he just slips and falls right over. Down maybe 50ft and into the water. Everybody rush [sic] to that side and look [sic] for him, but he don't [sic] come up. And nobody goes down to try and get him . . . So, we just saw that baby die and nobody did a thing. I could see the faces of the people that was stealing and robbing from folks. They saw that baby go down, and you could tell it didn't mean nothing to them. Not a thing.”<sup>31</sup>*

Do we have a societal responsibility to help one another? Or is “survival of the fittest” the rule of the game?

#### *2.2.4 Definition of Social Evil.*

Besides the standard moral and natural evils, Dr. Ted Poston postulated another type of evil: the social evils. “When a social evil occurs, responsibility for the outcome lies with no particular person and no impersonal force of nature; rather it lies with a group of people, each of whom may be morally in the clear.”<sup>32</sup>

For example, you are going to vote in the presidential election. For some good reasons, you do not like the candidates of either party. So, you decide to vote for the third-party contestant who has no chance of becoming the next president. Unbeknownst to you, a significant group of voters independently decide to do the same thing, siphoning votes from one party's candidate. As a result, the margin for the “winning” candidate is a razor thin 1000 votes (less

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/aug/27/katrina-survivors-tale-they-up-and-forgot-us>

<sup>32</sup> Ted Poston, “Social Evil,” 210.

than 0.5% of the votes cast) prompting budget-busting recounts, lawsuits, and accusations of racial inequality in the voting process (i.e., social evils).<sup>33</sup> However, responsibility for the social evil cannot be pinpointed on any particular person or on any force of nature.<sup>34</sup>

On August 24, 2016, *“Dana Majhi of Kalahandi (India), accompanied by his teenage daughter, carried his wife's dead body on his shoulders for nearly 12 km. His wife, Amangadei, had passed away the previous night due to tuberculosis at the district headquarters hospital at Bhawanipatna. Having no money for a vehicle, and after failing to get an ambulance or even a mortuary van from the hospital authorities, Majhi wrapped up his wife's dead body in old sheets and blankets, picked her up on his shoulders and started walking to his home . . . A silently sobbing daughter, carrying her schoolbag and walking alongside her father, shocked the conscience of the nation. However, the hospital was quick to wash its hands off, saying that Majhi took away the body without informing them. There is another side to the story – Majhi said he moved the body after the hospital staff pushed him to remove it. What's even more shocking is the fact that he did not carry the body walking through secluded paths. Instead, this horrifying spectacle took place on the main road, during broad daylight. And of course, there were people, who turned into voyeurs as this ordeal played out before their eyes. Are we living in hell?”*<sup>35</sup>

Can we ever escape from this fallen world replete with moral, natural, and social evils?

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<sup>33</sup> An example of such a situation is the 2000 US presidential election in Florida where George Bush's winning margin was only 537 votes.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Poston gave a different example: a drought in Los Angeles requiring the residents to cut down on their water consumption. Ted Poston, “Social Evil,” 211.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/india-stories-ashamed-humanity-odisha-man-carries-wife-body-delhi-sisters-pregnant-woman-mp/story/1/12612.html>

### 2.2.5 A Combination of Evils.

Of course, a particular evil may include some or all three aspects of evil. For example, Hurricane Katrina's disaster in 2005 was a natural evil coupled with moral evils (e.g., rapes, looting) and social evils (e.g., the shortcomings of the flood insurance program). The 2010 Haiti earthquake was a natural disaster (200,000 to 300,000 dead), with great moral evils (shootings, murders) and social evils (overpopulation and desperate poverty).<sup>36</sup> These evils bring us unwanted (and unwelcome) pains and sufferings on this earth. Various scholars in this literature review differentiate between "evil" and "suffering." Dr. Evans avers: "The distinction between evil and suffering is an important one, for these terms are not coextensive."<sup>37</sup> What exactly is "suffering"?

### 2.2.6 Definition of Suffering.

Suffering is broadly defined as "the state of undergoing pain,<sup>38</sup> distress or hardship,"<sup>39</sup> whether physical or emotional. Evil may happen without any suffering (e.g., criminals failed in their attempts to commit murders) and suffering may occur without any evil (e.g., a successful Botox injection). Sufferings can be the result of moral (e.g., tortures), natural (e.g., earthquakes) or social (e.g., poverty) evils.

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<sup>36</sup> We will mostly focus on moral and natural evils in our discussions.

<sup>37</sup> Jeremy Evans, *The Problem of Evil*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Dr. Eleonore Stump pointed out that "pain is neither necessary nor sufficient for human suffering. There can be great suffering in a human life even where there is no physical or psychological pain." Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Suffering: A Thomistic Approach," 13.

<sup>39</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/suffering>. Dr. Eleonore Stump wrote: "A human being suffers when he is kept from being what he ought to be, or when he is kept from having the desires of his heart, or both." Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Suffering, A Thomistic Approach," 14.

Dr. Haing Ngor, a Cambodian obstetrician hiding his training and identity under the genocidal rule of the Khmer Rouge, related the sufferings of his starving and pregnant wife, Huoy, as she tried to give birth without food or medicines.

*“I rubbed Huoy’s limbs again. She was wet from perspiration and from clenching. Even when she didn’t have labor pains, she was crying. The unthinkable was happening. Seng Orn (the midwife) pulled me aside for a conference. ‘Caesarean?’<sup>40</sup> she whispered. ‘Cannot!’ I hissed. ‘The chhlop (Khmer Rouge spy) is outside! Do you want to die too? We will all die! Huoy and the baby too! We have no instruments! We have no equipment!’ ‘Craniotomy?’ she suggested.<sup>41</sup> I took a deep breath and shook my head and took another deep breath. ‘No,’ I said. ‘Cannot.’ ‘I’m hungry, sweet,’ Huoy said feebly from the bed . . . We ran to the Khmer Rouge headquarters in Phum Phnom. To the center of enemy operations. And the cadre laughed at me. I was barefoot, in torn clothes, and they could not comprehend why I was so upset . . . They could not understand why I insisted my wife has a Caesarean section. They did not know what it was. By the time I came back to the house, it was midmorning . . . ‘I need food! I need food. I need medicine. Sweet, save my life. Please save my life. I’m too tired. I just need a spoonful of rice.’ Before she died, she asked me to cradle her. I swung her onto my lap, held her in my arms. She asked me to let her kiss me. I kissed her, and she kissed me. She looked up at me with her great round eyes, and they were full of sorrow. She didn’t want to leave. ‘Take care of yourself, sweet.’”<sup>42</sup>*

In the face of such atrocious sufferings, how should we respond to evil in our world?

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<sup>40</sup> A Caesarean section to deliver the baby.

<sup>41</sup> In other words, aborting the full-term baby.

<sup>42</sup> Haing Ngor, *Survival in the Killing Fields*, 355–57.

### 2.2.7 *The Problems of Evil.*

In view of the many opinions and diverse aspects of the question, evil is recognized as a broad issue. “Consequently, it is probably more accurate to speak of *problems of evil*, as there are various difficulties we are confronted with given evil’s reality.”<sup>43</sup> This literature review will only deal with the logical and evidential problems. We will first address the logical form of the question.

## 2.3 The Logical Problem of Evil.

The logical problem of evil claims that there is a *logical inconsistency* between the existence of an omniscient,<sup>44</sup> omnipotent,<sup>45</sup> and omnibenevolent (i.e., “possessing perfect and unlimited goodness”)<sup>46</sup> God and the presence of evil. Supposedly, a good God cannot *logically* exist with evil.

### 2.3.1 *The Logical Argument*

Epicurus was thought to be one of the first to bring up the logical problem of evil. David Hume summarized the issue in his famous rendering of Epicurus’ “riddle.”

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<sup>43</sup> Meister and Dew, eds, *God and the Problem of Evil*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Omniscient is defined as “possessed of universal or complete knowledge.” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/omniscient>

<sup>45</sup> Omnipotent is defined as “(of a deity) having unlimited power.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/omnipotent>

<sup>46</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/omnibenevolent>

*“Is he [God] 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?”<sup>47</sup>*

If our concept of God is that of an impotent and malevolent being, then there is no “problem of evil.”<sup>48</sup> There is no contradiction between the presence of horrendous evils<sup>49</sup> (e.g., the Holocaust) and the existence of a malevolent God who delights in evil, or an impotent God (or a non-existent God or an absentee God) who cannot restrain evil. However, if our concept of God is that of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being,<sup>50</sup> as affirmed by Christians, Jews, and Muslims, then we have a “problem of evil” or better stated a “problem of the existence of God and evil.”

We can see the problem in the following argument:

- (1) God (if he exists) is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.
- (2) God is omniscient and knows when evils occur.
- (3) God is omnipotent and has the power to prevent all evils.
- (4) God is omnibenevolent and wants to prevent all evils.
- (5) If the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God exists, there are no evils.

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<sup>47</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 196. Dr. Hickson offers a more complete discussion of Hume’s adaptation of Epicurus’ riddle. Michael Hickson, “A Brief History of Problems of Evil,” 6–8.

<sup>48</sup> Dr. John Feinberg brought up the issue that “there is no such thing as *the* problem of evil.” The problem of evil is multifaceted and can be subdivided into the logical problem of evil, the evidential problem of evil, and the religious problem of evil. The “problem of evil” can also be discussed as a problem of “gratuitous evils” and a problem of “excess evils” in the world. Furthermore, the concept of God also needs to be defined for a “Theonomy God,” a “Leibnizian God,” and a “Modified Rationalism God” are not the same God. John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*.

<sup>49</sup> The term “horrendous evils”, i.e., “evils the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant’s life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole,” was coined by Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 26.

<sup>50</sup> God may have other attributes (e.g., omnipresence, justice) that are not mentioned. However, for our purpose of explaining the problem of the “existence of God and evil,” the three attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence will suffice.

(6) There are evils.

(7) Therefore, the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God does not exist (i.e., God cannot logically exist with evil).<sup>51</sup>

(8) Thus, God (if he exists) is either not omniscient, not omnipotent, or not omnibenevolent.

In a nutshell, that is the “problem of the existence of God and evil” or the “problem of evil” for short. How does one resolve this logical “problem of evil” as shown by the propositions above?

Can an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God exist with horrendous evils?

Elie Wiesel, the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize winner, wrote about his crisis of faith at Auschwitz and Buchenwald where his parents, younger sister, and countless other innocent victims were murdered.

*“For the first time, I felt anger rising within me. Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent. What was there to thank Him for?”<sup>52</sup> . . . “Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky. Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes. Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.”<sup>53</sup>*

Can a good God exist with the unspeakable evils of the Holocaust?

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<sup>51</sup> Statements (5) to (7) form a valid modus tollens deductive argument.

<sup>52</sup> Elie Wiesel, *The Night Trilogy*, 51.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

### 2.3.2 *The Logical Problem*

The philosopher J. L. Mackie claimed that belief in God is “irrational,” considering the horrendous amounts of evil in the world. “Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively *irrational*, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrines are *inconsistent* with one another (emphases mine).”<sup>54</sup>

The logical inconsistency can be seen in statements (1) and (8).

(1) God (if he exists) is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.

(8) Thus, God (if he exists) is either not omniscient, not omnipotent, or not omnibenevolent.

Statements (1) and (8) are contradictory.

However, as in any deductive argument, the conclusion (statement 8) depends on the premises (statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6). If a flaw is found in one or more of the premises, the conclusion (8) will be unsupported.<sup>55</sup>

Is premise (3) necessarily true? Dr. Mackie claimed that an omnipotent God could prevent all evils by creating humans who have free will, yet *never* commit evil. Why then didn't God do so? “Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.”<sup>56</sup> Can God create a world of free people with *no evil*?<sup>57</sup> In

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<sup>54</sup> J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” 200.

<sup>55</sup> If statement (7) is unsupported, statement (8) is also unsupported since it is derived from (7). If (7) is unsupported, the conclusion that “God is either not omniscient, not omnipotent, or not omnibenevolent” is unsupported.

<sup>56</sup> J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” 209. Dr. John Hick concurred: “It appears to me that a perfectly good being, although formally free to sin, would in fact never do so.” John Hick, “Soul-Making Theodicy,” 268.

<sup>57</sup> Dr. Schellenberg wrote: “If for any world X that requires or permits evil there is some world Y that models pure goodness in God such that God has no good reason to create X rather than Y, then God has no good reason to permit evil in the world.” J. L. Schellenberg, “A New Logical Problem of Evil,” 42.



his “Free Will Defense,” Dr. Alvin Plantinga responded with “Leibniz’s lapse”<sup>58</sup> (i.e., contrary to Leibniz’s assertion, there are some worlds that not even an omnipotent God can create, in this case, a world populated by humans with free will who never commit evil).<sup>59</sup> Although Mackie’s proposed world was theoretically possible, it could *not* be actualized according to Plantinga’s theory of “Transworld depravity”<sup>60</sup> (i.e., every potential person with free will would do *some* evil in every possible world). “If every essence suffers from transworld depravity, then it was beyond the power of God himself to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.”<sup>61</sup> If so, premise (3), the claim that an “omnipotent God has the power to prevent all evils,” by creating a world with free will and no evil, is *not necessarily* true.

A second problem can be found in premise (4). Does the omnibenevolent God really want to prevent *every* single evil? Is it not possible that a good God has a *morally justifying reason* for allowing certain evils? What if the evil has a great redeeming good that cannot be obtained other than by allowing the (smaller) evil? For example, is it not evil to cut open an innocent child’s belly with a sharp knife and pull out her intestines, thus causing much pain and

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<sup>58</sup> The German philosopher Leibniz claimed that our world is “the best of all possible worlds” that God could create. Gottfried Leibniz, *Leibniz Selections*, 345–55. “As omnipotent, God is able to create any possible world He chooses to create.” Jesse R. Steinberg, “Leibniz, Creation and the Best of all Possible Worlds,” 123.

<sup>59</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 180–84.

<sup>60</sup> Transworld depravity is not universally accepted. “The reason why it is reasonable to refrain from believing D (Transworld Depravity) is that there is a proposition that we know is incompatible with D, and it is no more reasonable to believe D than it. That proposition is S: Necessarily, some essence or other enjoys Transworld Sanctity (TWS).” Daniel Howard-Snyder, “The Logical Problem of Evil: Mackie and Plantinga,” 24. Dr. Rasmussen argued that “the *probability* that everyone is transworld depraved is exceedingly low.” Joshua Rasmussen, “On Creating Worlds Without Evil,” 457.

<sup>61</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 53. Dr. Otte pointed out some weaknesses of Plantinga’s “Transworld Depravity” and suggested a better definition of the theory. “We need to modify Transworld Depravity so that the state of affairs that God strongly actualizes does not imply that the wrong choice was not made.” Richard Otte, “Transworld Depravity and Unobtainable Worlds,” 168. God only strongly actualizes a world W up to the time an action A occurs, thus allowing for the possibility of a wrong choice. Dr. Plantinga agreed and adopted the new definition. Alvin Plantinga, “Transworld Depravity, Transworld Sanctity, and Uncooperative Essences,” 178–91.

suffering?<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, that is what the surgeon must do to remove the toddler's inflamed appendix (i.e., a morally justifying reason, an evil necessary for the greater good).

Plantinga in his "Free Will Defense" stated such a morally justifying reason for God to allow moral evil.

*"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. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so."*<sup>63</sup>

Thus, according to Plantinga, it is *logically impossible* for God to create humans with *free will* to do good or evil<sup>64</sup> and at the same time make them always do what is good and never commit evil.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, God, in his benevolence, chooses the "greater good" (i.e., free will) and allows some evils that are smaller in value to the "greater good."<sup>66</sup> Of course, one can argue

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<sup>62</sup> Open appendectomies are still done in some young children due to the technical challenges of laparoscopic surgery in small abdominal cavities. Roshan Ali et al., "Laparoscopic versus open appendectomy in children," 247–49

<sup>63</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30.

<sup>64</sup> "Perverted will is the cause of evil, and it is useless to look further." Augustine, *The Problem of Free Choice*, 189.

<sup>65</sup> Plantinga subscribes to the concept of "libertarian free will," that people are free to choose good or evil (i.e., no determinism. Determinism is the "theory that all events, including moral choices, are completely determined by previously existing causes. Determinism is usually understood to preclude free will because it entails that humans cannot act otherwise than they do." <https://www.britannica.com/topic/determinism>). Libertarian free will is *incompatible* with determinism. Thus, Plantinga argued that God cannot create humans with libertarian free will *and* at the same time determines that they never commit evil. On the contrary, "the modern atheologian advocates a compatibilist view of human freedom." Bruce Reichenbach, "Evil and a Reformed View of God," 68. A compatibilist view of human freedom is the belief that "free will" is compatible with determinism. Thus, if compatibilism is true, God *can* make humans with free will and also determines that they will *always* do good and not evil.

<sup>66</sup> Augustine said: "For the Omnipotent God, whom even the heathen acknowledge as the Supreme Power over all, would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil." Augustine, *Enchiridion* III.11. Aquinas concurred: "This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.2.3

that human free will is “not worth” the horrendous evils in the world (e.g., the Holocaust) and that free will may not be a “greater good.”<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, the *possibility* remains that free will *may* be a “greater good,” and that God *may* have a morally justifying reason to allow moral evil.<sup>68</sup> All that is necessary to show a flaw in premise (4), i.e., God is omnibenevolent and wants to prevent *all* evils, is to come up with *one logically possible* scenario showing why a good God may not want to prevent some evil (e.g., God and evil can exist together for the “greater good” of free will). If there is such a possibility, however remote, the all-encompassing statement that “the omnibenevolent God would prevent *all* evils” would be inaccurate. It is not even necessary to prove that the possibility is true, likely to be true, plausible, or even reasonable. It is sufficient for a successful defense to point out a weakness and undermine the opponent’s argument.<sup>69</sup> Plantinga’s proposal that God may allow moral evils for the sake of human free will<sup>70</sup> is a reasonable defense against Mackie’s argument that the omnibenevolent God would want to prevent *all* evils.

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<sup>67</sup> “What can one say except that libertarian free will seems *just not worth it*. Here is a thought I find powerful: I can say in an instant that I would greatly prefer to live in a world without murder, rape, theft, persistent physical pain, the abuse of children, and wrongdoing and victimization of all sorts, even if that world lacked deserved praise and blame and even if our sense of ourselves as agents facing of an open future were incorrect. A world of all good—only pleasure, kindness, right choices, no pain and no suffering—seems far superior to a world like ours, particularly if it is true that that world can contain love and meaningful lives (emphasis in original).” Laura W. Ekstrom, “The Cost of Freedom,” 77. “No good that it (a theodicy) can envision, on earth or beyond, is worth the freedom—enfeebled and empowered—that wastes so much life.” John K. Roth, “A Theodicy of Protest,” 14.

<sup>68</sup> It is *possible* that a world with “free creatures and evil” is more valuable than a world with “unfree” creatures and no evil or a world with no creatures at all.

<sup>69</sup> Dr. Trakakis commented: “[A] defence aims to identify *possible* reasons as to why God permits evil . . . while a theodicy elucidates *plausible* reasons as to why God permits evil, where plausibility amounts to an account which ‘is true for all we know’ . . . There is also a more modest notion of ‘defence’ involving only the attempt to defeat or undercut an argument from evil, without seeking to delineate even any possible reasons as to why God permits evil (emphases in original).” Nick Trakakis, “Response to Bishop,” 59. We use “defense” in its more modest version, an undercutting of an argument from evil. Dr. Howard-Snyder has a different understanding of “defense.” Daniel Howard-Snyder, “The Logical Problem of Evil: Mackie and Plantinga,” 19–33.

<sup>70</sup> For a successful defense against the “Logical Argument from Evil,” Plantinga does not even need to *identify* a possible reason (i.e., free will) for the existence of evil. Dr. Trakakis opined: “The theist need only hold that *it is possible that there are reasons beyond our ken for God’s permission of evil*—and how could such a minimal claim be rejected? This, of course, is the skeptical theist strategy, now employed to counteract the Logical Argument from Evil (emphases in original).” Nick Trakakis, “Response to Bishop,” 59.

How does Plantinga explain the existence of God and natural evil?

*“Natural evil is due to the free actions of nonhuman persons; there is a balance of good over evil with respect to the actions of these nonhuman persons; and it was not within the power of God to create a world that contains a more favorable balance of good over evil with respect to the actions of the nonhuman persons it contains . . . In fact, both moral and natural evil would then be special cases of what we might call broadly moral evil — evil resulting from the free actions of personal beings, whether human or not.”<sup>71</sup>*

While some of us may question the claim that natural evils in the world are the results of Satan’s and the demons’ free wills,<sup>72</sup> it is not necessary to prove that the theory is true.<sup>73</sup> It is sufficient to show that it is logically valid, and therefore *possible*. Thus, premise (4) claiming that God is omnibenevolent and wants to prevent *all* evils (moral and natural) is *not necessarily* true, due to the “greater good” of free will for humans and non-human persons.

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<sup>71</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 58–59.

<sup>72</sup> Plantinga acknowledged that “this suggestion is not at present widely popular in western academia, and not widely endorsed by the contemporary intellectual elite.” Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 377. Thus, “if a defense appeals to some possibility that is very improbable, then it is epistemically hobbled.” Evan Fales, “Theodicy in a Vale of Tears,” 350.

<sup>73</sup> Plantinga’s defense has been challenged. The claim that free will is of great worth, outweighing all the evils in the world is questionable. The claim that God cannot create a world with free will beings and no evil appears to contradict the classical view of heaven where sanctified dwellers have free will in the absence of evil (moral, natural or social). “That impeccability belongs to the orthodox Christian concept of heaven is . . . beyond any doubt.” Simon Francis Gaine, *Will there Be Free Will in Heaven?* 11. Thus, God could forgo the creation of this world and proceed directly to the creation of a heavenly one. Also, the claim that natural evils are the results of the exercise of free will by Satan and the demons has been challenged by David K. Johnson, “The Failure of Plantinga’s Solution,” 145–57. Furthermore, if free will requires the possibility of doing evil, then God must not have free will as he can never commit evil. However, most theists would assert that God has free will. If that is true, then free will does not require the possibility of doing evil. Therefore, it must be possible for God to create humans with free will who never commit evil. Why then didn’t God do so? Despite these problems and objections, Plantinga’s defense against Mackie’s broad claim is still valid as it is *logically possible* for God to exist with evil. The appeal to “Leibniz’s lapse” and “Transworld Depravity” (argument against premise 3) may not even be necessary for “in this context, Plantinga has only to show the *bare logical possibility* that God could not have created a world with free creatures in it that did not contain these amounts and kinds of evil (emphases in original).” Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 37. In summary, it is *possible* for God and evil to exist together since God *possibly* cannot create a world with free will and without evil (*for all we know* due to a possible “Transworld Depravity”). Free will (for humans and demons) is *possibly* of greater worth than all the evils in the world (i.e., a *morally justifying* reason to allow evils). Thus, an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God can *logically* exist with evil in a world with libertarian free will.

The “Free Will Defense” provides a logical scenario for the existence of God and (moral and natural) evils in the world.

(1) God (if he exists) is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.

(2) God is omniscient and knows when evils may occur.

(3') God is omnipotent but *cannot* create a world with free will humans *and* without evil, due to the “*Transworld Depravity*” of humans with libertarian free will.

(4') God is omnibenevolent and wants to prevent all evils, *unless he has a morally justifying reason for not doing so*.

(5') *God has a morally justifying reason (libertarian free will for humans and non-human beings) to allow moral and natural evils.*

(6) There are evils.

(7') *God and evil can exist together.*

Contrary to Mackie’s argument (i.e., statements 1 to 8 are logically inconsistent), the statements (1) to (7') are consistent with one another. As the “Free Will Defense” is *logically valid and internally self-consistent*, it is incumbent on the advocates for the position “that the several parts of the essential theological doctrines are inconsistent with one another” to prove their point. Such a proof is still elusive.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, there are weaknesses in Mackie’s argument (i.e., in premises 3 and 4), negating the conclusion that it is irrational/illogical to believe in an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God in the presence of evil.

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<sup>74</sup> Dr. Beebe wrote: “We should keep in mind that all parties admit that Plantinga's Free Will Defense successfully rebuts the logical problem of evil as it was formulated by atheists during the mid-twentieth-century. If there is any blame that needs to go around, it may be that some of it should go to Mackie and other atheologians for claiming that the problem of evil was a problem of inconsistency.” James Beebe, “Logical Problem of Evil,” section 8. Dr. Howard-Snyder countered: “Beebe exaggerates, as do the others.” Daniel Howard-Snyder, “The Logical Problem of Evil,” 23.

Plantinga's defense uses libertarian free will<sup>75</sup> to counter the "logical problem of evil." However, that may not be the only possible defense. Consider a world with no libertarian free will and no determinism. It is a universe where randomness reigns. "The decay of an unstable nucleus is entirely random, and it is impossible to predict when a particular atom will decay."<sup>76</sup> Brain neuron firings, triggered by "indeterministic atomic events," may result in purposeless good or evil actions,<sup>77</sup> negating any free will choices. In this scenario, God's omniscience may not include complete knowledge of future events.<sup>78</sup> God may not foreknow and thus cannot

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<sup>75</sup> "Libertarian free will means that our choices are free from the determination or constraints of human nature and free from any predetermination by God. All 'free will theists' hold that libertarian freedom is essential for moral responsibility, for if our choice is determined or caused by anything, including our own desires, they reason, it cannot properly be called a free choice. Libertarian freedom is, therefore, the freedom to act contrary to one's nature, predisposition and greatest desires. Responsibility, in this view, always means that one could have done otherwise." <https://www.theopedia.com/libertarian-free-will>. Libertarian free will is not universally accepted. Heath White wrote: "God's sovereignty is maximal, and his will determines everything that happens down to the smallest detail. One consequence of TD (theological determinism) is that, whatever kind of free will we have, it is not libertarian." Heath White, *Fate and Free Will*, 3. The use of libertarian free will in the "Free Will Defense" raises some issues with God's omniscience. "But as Augustine saw, the success of the free will defense is logically dependent on the solution of another difficulty: viz., if an omniscient God foreknows what I shall do — and surely, it seems, He must — then I cannot act other than I do and, consequently, I do not act freely. Hence, the insistence that God is omniscient seems logically incompatible with the free will defense against the problem of evil." Joseph Runzo, "Omniscience and Freedom for Evil," 131. "This means that the theist resolves the apparent contradiction at one point in his system only to find that the solution generates an apparent contradiction at another point in his system." John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 86. In his "Free Will Defense," Dr. Plantinga advocated Molinism as the answer to the problem. "It seems to me much clearer that some counterfactuals of freedom are at least possibly true." Alvin Plantinga, "Reply to Robert Adams," 378–79. "It is difficult to see how the free will defense, in anything like the version Plantinga offers, could succeed unless Molinism is true." Thomas Flint, "Providence and Theodicy," 261. Dr. Zagzebski claimed that Molinism "is neither necessary nor sufficient to avoid theological fatalism by itself." Linda Zagzebski, "Foreknowledge and Free Will."

As the problem of evil is interconnected with the problem of God's sovereignty and human free will, a single viable solution needs to be found for both problems. The "Quantum Proposal" has been suggested by the author. God may create two (or more paths) for humans to choose from (thus giving them libertarian free will) within God's predetermined boundaries (thus affirming God's sovereignty). Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*.

<sup>76</sup> [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Radioactive\\_decay](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Radioactive_decay)

<sup>77</sup> "Some philosophers and scientists argue that perhaps these random and indeterministic atomic events associated with quantum mechanics might trigger the random firing of neurons in the brain, leading to indeterminant mental states." Michael Shermer, *The Science of Good and Evil*, 123. "If indeterminism is true, then, though things could have happened otherwise, it is not the case that we could have chosen otherwise, since a merely random event is no kind of free choice. That some events occur causelessly, or are not subject to law, or only to probabilistic law, is not sufficient for those events to be free choices." Colin McGinn, *Problems in Philosophy*, 80.

<sup>78</sup> We are not advocating that a world without libertarian free will and without determinism actually exists or can be equated with our present world. We are also not claiming that God's omniscience does not encompass the random effects of Quantum Mechanics. We are only pointing out a *logically possible* scenario that would negate the claim that God could and would prevent all evils.

prevent random evils from occurring. A world with random evils (a possible representation of our world)<sup>79</sup> negates Mackie's assertion that the presence of evil is incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient,<sup>80</sup> and omnibenevolent God.

In summary, Mackie's argument can be countered by Plantinga's "Free Will Defense" as well as by other theodicies (e.g., Dr. John Hick's "Soul Making"), since a mere *possible* justifying reason, however unlikely (e.g., free will for Satan and demons), is enough to discredit an argument based on "logical impossibility." Unfortunately for theists, the literature review of the subject does not end here.

Following the (probably) successful refutation<sup>81</sup> of the "Logical Problem of Evil," contemporary philosophers have developed a newer (and more difficult to challenge) version of the "problem of the existence of God and evil." This new proposal is known as the "Evidential Problem of Evil." Rather than making a strong deductive argument that God and evil are logically incompatible, philosophers use an evidential/inductive argument to show that the presence of evil makes it *improbable* that God exists.<sup>82</sup> To that problem we now turn.

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<sup>79</sup> According to some scientists, a world with inherent randomness can be compared to our actual world. "Randomness is considered to be inherent in the quantum domain." Bera et al. "Randomness in Quantum Mechanics," 2.

<sup>80</sup> In this scenario, the definition of "omniscience" has changed from "God has exhaustive foreknowledge of all future events" to "God may not know all the future, since random futures cannot be known." Thus, it is important to clearly define the terms used in an argument.

<sup>81</sup> "Mackie eventually gave up on the logical problem of evil contained in Mackie (1955)." Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The Logical Problem of Evil," footnote 1, 21. Dr. William Rowe averred: "Some philosophers have contended that the existence of evil is *logically inconsistent* with the existence of a theistic god. No one, I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant claim." William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," footnote 1, 335. "Many theists and non-theists came to agree that the free will defense shows that the logical argument against theism, as exemplified in Mackie, fails." Michael Peterson, "Introduction," 4. However, Dr. Graham Oppy argued "that —contrary to widely received opinion — logical arguments from evil are well and truly alive and kicking." Graham Oppy, "Arguments from Moral Evil," 59. "It may well be, according to Oppy, that there are yet-to-be-discovered versions of the logical argument from evil that are successful." Chad Meister and Paul Moser, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, 5. Dr. John Bishop wrote: "If the very notion of a justification for an agent's refraining from using available power to prevent such horrors is immoral, then there is a successful logical Argument from Evil—though one that is relativized to this strong moral judgment." John Bishop, "On Identifying the Problem of Evil," 50.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Tooley gave a more detailed discussion in "The Problem of Evil."

## 2.4 The Evidential Problem of Evil.

“The evidential problem of evil is the problem of determining whether and, if so, to what extent the existence of evil (or particular instances, kinds, quantities, or distributions of evil)<sup>83</sup> constitutes evidence against the existence of God.”<sup>84</sup> Philosophers use an inductive<sup>85</sup> argument to support the claim that an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent (probably) does not exist in the presence of evil. Dr. William Rowe’s presentation is the most well-known rendition of the problem.<sup>86</sup>

### *2.4.1 William Rowe’s Evidential Argument From Evil*

Rowe used some concrete examples to illustrate the issue.

E1: The case of “Bambi”<sup>87</sup> (a case of natural evil).

“In some distant forest, lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire, a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering.”<sup>88</sup>

E2: The case of “Sue”<sup>89</sup> (a case of moral evil).

A five-year-old girl in Flint, Michigan was beaten, raped, then strangled by her mother’s boyfriend on New Year’s Day, 1986.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> The Holocaust is a particular instance of evil. Robbery or earthquake are kinds of evil. The number of murders in a country is a quantity of evil. Drug overdoses in various cities reflect the distribution of evil in a society.

<sup>84</sup> Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil.”

<sup>85</sup> “An inductive argument is an argument that is intended by the arguer to be strong enough that, if the premises were to be true, then it would be unlikely that the conclusion is false. So, an inductive argument’s success or strength is a matter of degree, unlike with deductive arguments.” <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ded-ind/>

<sup>86</sup> The “problem of evil” will henceforth refer to the “evidential problem of evil.”

<sup>87</sup> William Alston, “The Inductive Argument from Evil,” 32.

<sup>88</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” 336.

<sup>89</sup> William Alston, “The Inductive Argument from Evil,” 32.

<sup>90</sup> William Rowe, “Evil and Theodicy,” 120.



In a landmark paper, Rowe presented his formal argument for the evidential problem of evil:

*“(1) There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.*

*(2) An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.*

*(3). There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.”<sup>91</sup>*

Statement (1) is commonly known as the “Factual Premise,” and statement (2) as the “Theological Premise.” For simplicity’s sake, statement (1) can be shortened to “There are gratuitous evils” if we define “gratuitous evils” as “instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.”<sup>92</sup> Similarly, statement (2) can be shortened to “God prevents all gratuitous evils” or “If God exists, then there are no gratuitous evils.”<sup>93</sup>

Putting the simplified statements together, we obtain:

(1’) There are gratuitous evils (Factual Premise).

(2’) If God exists, then there are no gratuitous evils (Theological Premise).

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<sup>91</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” 336.

<sup>92</sup> John Feinberg describes three types of gratuitous evils: “(1) an evil is gratuitous if it fails to possess some intrinsic quality or conform to some absolute standard of goodness—presumably, possessing that quality or conforming to that standard would justify the evil, (2) an evil is gratuitous if it serves no further end once it occurs, i.e., it is neither causally nor logically connected to the production of a subsequent good—presumably, that good would justify the evil, (3) an evil is gratuitous if it or its possibility has no antecedent good to which it is tied as an effect or by-product—presumably, the good that would cause it or is its concomitant would justify it.” John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 273. The adopted definition (following Rowe’s statement) is closest to Feinberg’s second type of gratuitous evil. Concerning an evil with an antecedent good (e.g., free will, Feinberg’s third category), Hasker commented: “I believe it best fits our moral intuitions to hold that, in the case of an evil action leading to severe harm, at most a small proportion of the evil is offset by the good involved in the agent’s freedom to choose to act in this way.” William Hasker, “God and Gratuitous evil,” 478.

<sup>93</sup> Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 51.

(3') Therefore, God does not exist (i.e., An omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being does not exist).<sup>94</sup>

The conclusion (3') is logically correct (i.e., a valid and sound argument) if the premises (1' and 2') are true.<sup>95</sup> However, strong objections have been raised against both premises. Let us turn to the argument against Rowe's first premise, the "Factual Premise."

#### *2.4.2 Argument Against the Factual Premise*

Rowe's Factual Premise reads as follows:

"(1). There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse."<sup>96</sup>

Or for short,

(1'). There are gratuitous evils.

Rowe used an inductive/probabilistic argument to defend his Factual Premise.

"P: No good state of affairs that we know of is such that an omnipotent, omniscient being's obtaining it would morally justify that being's permitting E1 or E2."<sup>97</sup>

In other words, *no good that we know of* justifies God in permitting E1 ("Bambi") or E2 ("Sue").

*Therefore, it is likely that,*

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<sup>94</sup> This is a valid modus tollens argument. Whether the argument is sound depends on its premises.

<sup>95</sup> Dr. Tooley proposed a slightly different form of the argument. Michael Tooley, "The Problem of Evil."

<sup>96</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," 336.

<sup>97</sup> William Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," 72.

“Q: No good state of affairs is such that an omnipotent, omniscient being’s obtaining it would morally justify that being in permitting E1 or E2.”<sup>98</sup>

In other words, *no good at all* justifies God in permitting E1 or E2.

The inductive argument is an inference from P to Q (if P then Q). Of course, Q corresponds to Rowe’s Factual Premise. “*No good at all* justifies God in permitting E1 or E2” corresponds to “There are gratuitous evils.” E1 and/or E2 are gratuitous evils (i.e., evils with no good at all justifying God in permitting them). Note that the induction from P to Q is a *probabilistic* inference (i.e., “*Therefore, it is likely that* there are gratuitous evils”) rather than a conclusive deduction.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, Rowe only claims that *if* we are “putting aside whatever reasons there may be to think that the theistic God exists, the facts about evil in our world provide good reason to think that God does not exist.”<sup>100</sup> In other words, positive evidence for the existence of God (e.g., the fine tuning of the universe, Plantinga’s “internal instigation of the Holy Spirit”)<sup>101</sup> can counteract any negative evidence raised by the existence of evil (e.g., E1 and E2).<sup>102</sup> The *probability* that God exists is driven downward by the evidence of evil but upward by the positive evidence<sup>103</sup> for the existence of God.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Dr. Richard Swinburne advocated the principle of credulity: “I suggest that it is a principle of rationality that (in the absence of special considerations), if it seems (epistemically) to a subject that x is present (and has some characteristic), then *probably* x is present (emphasis mine).” Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 303. Rowe’s and Swinburne’s approaches are both probabilistic arguments.

<sup>100</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, Michael Bergmann, and William Rowe, “An Exchange on the Problem of Evil,” 136.

<sup>101</sup> “Suppose Christian and theistic belief has a good deal of warrant for me by way of faith and the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit (IHS); then the fact that theism is evidentially challenged doesn’t give me a defeater and doesn’t bring about that my theistic belief is irrational.” Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 478–79.

<sup>102</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “The Probabilistic Argument from Evil,” 1–53.

<sup>103</sup> If the positive evidence for the existence of God is deemed strong, a “Moorean Shift” can be used to refute the opponent’s argument. See Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 62–66. A Moorean shift is “a strategy for refuting a philosophical argument with a very controversial argument premise. The ‘shifter’ starts with the negation of the conclusion as their first premise, then uses that to argue that one of the original premises is false.”

<https://quizlet.com/111217760/philosophy-key-terms-flash-cards/>

<sup>104</sup> Nick Trakakis gave a more detailed discussion in the “Evidential Problem of Evil.”

Thus, *even if* Rowe’s probabilistic argument can be proved in its entirety (i.e., it is probable that there are gratuitous evils and therefore it is improbable that God exists), the theist can “go on to claim that the positive evidence for theism outweighs the negative evidence constituted by the existence of apparently gratuitous evil.”<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, that is not the only rebuttal to Rowe’s argument.

#### 2.4.2.1 The Skeptical Theism Defense.

Is Rowe’s probabilistic argument sound and well-supported by evidence? Dr. Stephen Wykstra demurred and countered Rowe’s reasoning with the “twofold core of skeptical theism.”<sup>106</sup>

*“The first claim is that if God does exist, we humans should not expect to see or grasp very much of this God’s purposes. The second is that once we take measure of this, we can see that many things that might seem to be strong evidence against God aren’t strong evidence at all.”*<sup>107</sup>

Thus, Wykstra raised a strong objection<sup>108</sup> to Rowe’s inductive argument from P to Q. “*No good that we know of*” does not necessarily infer ‘*no good at all.*’” Wykstra called Rowe’s

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<sup>105</sup> Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 52.

<sup>106</sup> “Skeptical Theism” may be a contemporary form of a Butlerian type of theodicy. Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion Natural*.

<sup>107</sup> Stephen Wykstra, “A Skeptical Theist View,” 109.

<sup>108</sup> Stephen Wykstra presented his CORNEA (Condition Of Reasonable Epistemic Access) argument in “The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments,” 73–93. Plantinga opined: “Why suppose that if God *does* have a reason for permitting evil, the theist would be the first to know?” Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 10. Rowe claimed that Plantinga’s criticism of the inference from P to Q is questionable: “One is entitled to infer Q from P only if she has a good reason to think that if some good had J (justifying reason to allow evils) it would be a good that she knows of . . . It is not a cogent criticism.” William Rowe, “Ruminations about Evil,” 3–74. Nevertheless, Rowe’s inductive argument supporting the Factual Premise is subject to three types of criticism: 1. If a state of affairs (e.g., the Holocaust) has a good with J (a justifying reason to allow evils), are we able to *recognize* that it is a good with J? 2. Assuming that we are able to recognize a good with J, did we sample *both* known and unknown goods (i.e., a representative sample) of that state of affairs (looking for J) in order to confidently affirm that *all* goods (known and unknown) of that state of affairs have no justifying reasons (i.e., no good has J)? 3. Assuming that we have a representative sample, did we sample *enough* (known and unknown) goods (i.e., the size of the representative sample) of that state of affairs (looking for J) to confidently (e.g., 95% confidence) affirm that *all* goods (known and unknown) of that state of affairs have no justifying reasons (i.e., no good has J)?

argument from P<sup>109</sup> to Q a “Noseeum”<sup>110</sup> inference, as in “I no see ’um” so “they ain’t there.” The question is: “If they are there, is it likely that I will see them?”<sup>111</sup> The “Noseeum” inference may work in the case of cows in a room (i.e., “I no see ’um” so “they ain’t there”), but it definitely does not work in the case of roaches in a room (i.e., who can claim that “I no see ’um roaches” so “they ain’t there”?). Wysktra argued that Rowe’s “Noseeum” inference “is faulty at its very first step. From seeing no point for some horrific event, we should not assert that it doesn’t appear to serve any point.”<sup>112</sup>

As an analogy, *no good reason that I know of* justifies some parents (e.g., friends of mine) for refusing to take their sick child to the doctor. I know they have health insurance and they are well-to-do. Thus, money cannot be the issue (furthermore, hospitals must treat ill patients regardless of payments). They love their kid and therefore neglect is not a problem. The wife is a stay-at-home mom. She has her own car and it is in working order. So, time availability and transportation are not major concerns. Besides, we still have taxicabs. I know that the boy has a regular pediatrician whose office is nearby. And if the doctor is unavailable for some reason, they can still go to the emergency room. For my life, I cannot figure out why they would not take their ill toddler to the doctor or the hospital. If this goes on much longer, I will have to call the police and Child Protective Services!

However, can I honestly say that the parents have *no good reason at all* for not taking their ailing boy to a physician? Because “I no see ’um reasons,” does it mean that “they ain’t

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<sup>109</sup> Besides the controversial inference from P to Q, Dr. Bergmann even questioned the validity of premise P. Michael Bergmann, “Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil,” 374–99.

<sup>110</sup> Stephen Wysktra, “Rowe’s Noseeum Arguments from Evil,” 127. Rowe called his argument “a ‘noconceivum’ argument, not a ‘noseeum’ argument. We cannot even conceive of goods that may occur and would justify God in permitting the terrible evils that afflict our world.” William Rowe, “Reply to Howard-Snyder and Bergmann,” 160.

<sup>111</sup> A “noseeum” inference/argument relies on the “noseeum” assumption, i.e., it is “more likely than not we’d detect (see, discern) the item in question if it existed.” Daniel Howard-Snyder and Michael Bergmann, “Evil, Evidence, and Skeptical Theism--A Debate,” 147.

<sup>112</sup> Stephen Wysktra, “A Skeptical Theist View,” 116.

there”? Or is it possible that there are some very good grounds for them to allow their sick child to stay at home although I cannot fathom their rationale?<sup>113</sup>

Can I command the parents to reveal their reasons to me? I may surely expect some answers (as we are friends) but can I demand to know? Don't they have the right to share or not to share? Are they obligated to reveal their motives to me immediately or can they do so in their own timing?

Likewise, should I insist that God reveal his reasons to me? I may surely hope but can I require him to explain himself? Is there an obligation on God's part to share his thoughts with me? And if he does not divulge his motives, does that mean that he has *no good reason at all* and that the evils are indeed gratuitous?<sup>114</sup>

#### 2.4.2.2 Objections to the Skeptical Theism Defense.

According to Rowe, “on the basis of the good-parent analogy, we should infer that it is likely that God, too, will almost always be consciously present to humans, if not other animals, when he permits them to suffer for goods they cannot comprehend, giving special assurances of his love for them.”<sup>115</sup> The fact that he does *not* give us some reasons for our sufferings and special assurances of his love can lead us to question his existence.

Dr. Michael Peterson wrote: “Something in the neighborhood of ontological, epistemological, and moral realism is implicit in classical theological orthodoxy. But this means that theology provided indirect support for the Factual Premise and the kinds of reasons Rowe

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<sup>113</sup> I learned to my sorrow that a mother refused to take her child to the hospital for more painful tests as he was terminally ill with brain cancer.

<sup>114</sup> Stephen Wykstra gave a “parent-infant” analogy in “The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments,” 73–93. Other analogies are given by William Alston, “Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil,” 316–19.

<sup>115</sup> William Rowe, Daniel Howard-Snyder, and Michael Bergmann, “Evil, Evidence, and Skeptical Theism--A Debate,” 137.

gives for rationally believing it.”<sup>116</sup> If so, Rowe’s position that there are gratuitous evils in the world is supported by Christian doctrines and human experience.

Dr. Michael Bergmann countered that a good God may allow us to suffer evils for the sake of some good unknown to us. Furthermore, such a perfect being may also choose to hide his presence (i.e., a period of “divine hiddenness”)<sup>117</sup> and not give us special assurances of his love for the sake of some ultimate good, unknown to us during our tribulations.<sup>118</sup>

Dr. Nick Trakakis, in defense of Rowe, replied:

*“It borders on the absurd to believe that good states of affairs are so related to the vast array of horrendous evils that an infinitely powerful and infinitely loving being is unable to prevent any of these evils without (a) forfeiting a greater good 1, (b) forfeiting a greater good 2 if he enables the sufferer to understand good 1, (c) forfeiting a greater good 3 if he is consciously present to those who suffer for a good 1 they cannot understand, and (d) forfeiting a greater good 4 if he enables the sufferers to understand good 3. Such a view strains our credibility to such an extent that we would require strong evidence for the existence of God before we could reasonably accept it.”*<sup>119</sup>

In the story of Job,<sup>120</sup> one can speculate that the evils cannot be prevented without (a) forfeiting good 1 (e.g., Job’s edification and maturity). The evils cannot be prevented without (b) forfeiting a greater good 2 if the sufferer is enabled to understand good 1 (e.g., Job did not understand why he needed to suffer evils for his edification. Yet he *freely* chose to remain loyal and *earned God’s praise*, good 2, Job 2:3). The evils cannot be prevented without (c) forfeiting a

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<sup>116</sup> Michael Peterson, “Christian Theism and the Evidential Argument from Evil,” 181.

<sup>117</sup> Daniel Speak mentioned the “Problem of Divine Hiddenness” in *The Problem of Evil*, 73–93.

<sup>118</sup> Michael Bergmann, “Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil,” 374–99.

<sup>119</sup> Nick Trakakis, *The God Beyond Belief: In Defense of William Rowe’s Evidential Argument From Evil*, 196–97.

<sup>120</sup> We are only using Job as an example. One can substitute the real-life story of a Christian suffering from cancer.

greater good 3 if God is consciously present to those who suffer for a good 1 they cannot understand (God was not consciously present to Job until the very end so Job could *freely* strengthen his faith, good 3). The evils cannot be prevented without (d) forfeiting a greater good 4 if the sufferers are enabled to understand good 3 (Job did not understand that he needed to strengthen his faith. He eventually learned the lesson, good 4, that God did not owe him any answers and that his faith in God was not as strong as he thought since he *demanded* answers from God, Job 23:4–5). Thus, it is reasonable to believe that evils cannot be prevented without forfeiting goods 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Drs. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Michael Bergmann concluded: “The Atheist’s Noseum Assumption says that, more likely than not, we’d see a God-justifying reason if there were one. We have argued that it is not reasonable to accept it . . . we’re saying that it is not more reasonable to affirm than to refrain from affirming the Atheist’s Noseum Assumption.”<sup>121</sup>

Pastor Rick Warren, the author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, pondered the problem while reminiscing about the suicide of his 27-year-old son Matthew.

*“All the ‘why’ questions. The biggest one for me is, ‘Why didn’t you answer the prayer I prayed every day for 27 years?’ The prayer I prayed more than any other prayer went unanswered. But explanations never comfort. What you need in tragedy is not an explanation, you need the presence of God . . . Surrender is when you say I’d rather live and walk with God and have my questions unanswered than have all my questions answered and not walk with God.”*<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> William Rowe, Daniel Howard-Snyder, and Michael Bergmann, “Evil, Evidence, and Skeptical Theism--A Debate,” 153. Critiques of the “Skeptical Theism” defense can be found in Phillip Cary’s, William Lane Craig’s, William Hasker’s, and Thomas Jay Oord’s responses in *God and the Problem of Evil: Five Views*, 131–72.

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/Rick-Warren-My-son-s-suicide-and-God-s-garden-of-grace>



Can we demand to know God's reasons for allowing evils, pains, and sufferings in our lives? Is God obligated to answer our questions (e.g., Job)? And if we do not get clear answers from God concerning the gratuitousness (or non-gratuitousness) of evils, can we assume that he does not exist? Is it possible that God is sparing us from further pains and sorrows by not revealing his reasons? Corrie ten Boom wrote about her Nazi interrogator in the Scheveningen prison.

*"The hardest thing for him seemed to be that Christians should suffer. 'How can you believe in God now?' he'd ask. 'What kind of a God would have let that old man (Corrie's 84-years-old father) die here in Scheveningen?' I got up from the chair and held my hands out to the squat little stove. I did not understand either why Father had died in such a place. I did not understand a great deal. And suddenly I was thinking of Father's own answer to hard questions: 'Some knowledge is too heavy . . . you cannot bear it . . . your Father will carry it until you are able.'"*<sup>123</sup>

In summary, Rowe's "Factual Premise" (i.e., "There are gratuitous evils") cannot be proved (at least not to everyone's satisfaction)<sup>124</sup> as the inference from P to Q is challenged by the "Skeptical Theism" defense. Furthermore, Rowe's argument that God "will almost always be consciously present to humans, if not other animals, when he permits them to suffer for goods they cannot comprehend" is undermined by the well-known theory of "divine hiddenness"<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Corrie Ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*, 159.

<sup>124</sup> "Skeptical theists Stephen Wykstra, William Alston, Michael Bergmann, Dan Howard-Snyder, and others argue that Rowe has not provided a good reason to think that premise (1) [the Factual Premise] is true or probably true." Michael Peterson, "Christian Theism and the Evidential Argument from Evil," 170.

<sup>125</sup> Daniel Speak mentioned the "Problem of Divine Hiddenness," in *The Problem of Evil*, 73–93. Divine hiddenness used to refer to the fact that God often stays hidden and uncommunicative while humans cry for relief and succor (e.g., Job). God may do so to test and strengthen his followers' faith and trust in him, with the goal of making them more mature and responsible believers. He may also want to avoid undue pressure on non-theists to believe in his existence. In the current philosophical and theological context, "divine hiddenness" is the problem of a good God allowing fair-minded and good-hearted people to have "reasonable nonbelief" in his existence. According to Schellenberg, the presence of such "reasonable nonbelievers" counts as evidence against the existence of a good

where God *purposefully* hides his presence for various reasons (e.g., test of faith, Murray’s “non-coercion” to preserve human freedom).<sup>126</sup> Thus, Rowe’s conclusion that God probably does not exist is open to question.<sup>127</sup>

To be clear, skeptical theists are not skeptic about the existence of God, they are only skeptic about their ability to discover God’s reasons behind his actions. In a defense like the “Skeptical Theism” defense, “the goal is to avoid the definite refutation of theism.”<sup>128</sup> A successful defense would show that some premises used to justify a conclusion (e.g., God does not exist) were not *necessarily* true, in this case, the Factual Premise.<sup>129</sup> “A defense has the advantage of being less demanding than a theodicy; it does not require one to say anything about God’s actual or possible reasons for permitting some evils to occur.”<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, “a

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God. See J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, and J. L. Schellenberg, “Evil, Hiddenness, and Atheism,” 108–23. Would the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God, creator of the universe consider unbelief in his existence a “reasonable nonbelief” after expending incredible amounts of time, effort, money (billions of dollars) and lives of his followers (and his own involvement through the Holy Spirit) to spread the message? Even assuming that some nonbelief is “reasonable,” God may not want to decrease the “divine hiddenness” and thereby coerce humans into believing in his existence by his sheer presence. However, Dr. Keller avers: “I conclude that God’s not being hidden would probably be a more successful policy for achieving what Christians typically claim are God’s wishes for humans.” James Keller, “Process Theism and Theodicies for Problems of Evil,” 342. Even if God totally discards “divine hiddenness” and writes messages in the sky, it is doubtful that non-theists would change their minds concerning their “reasonable nonbelief.” “Such evidence ‘would not necessarily be overwhelming. An atheist would, if he thought that was what he saw, no doubt wish to explore other avenues of inquiry before falling on his knees’ . . . ‘Determined skeptics might not be persuaded regardless of the type or amount of evidence’ . . . ‘even if God spoke by skywriting messages, there would be grounds for honest skepticism (emphases in original)’” Dr. Taber quoted Anthony Kenny and Timothy Paul Erdel. Tyler Taber, “Divine Hiddenness and the Problem of Evil,” 23–24. Thus, God gives people freedom to believe in him or not. A more in-depth discussion of the problem of divine hiddenness can be found in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Adam Green, “Hiddenness of God.”

<sup>126</sup> Michael Murray, “Coercion and the Hiddenness of God,” 27–38.

<sup>127</sup> Besides the Skeptical Theism defense, the Factual Premise can also be challenged by theodicies like Alvin Plantinga’s “Felix Culpa” theodicy, John Hick’s “Soul-Making” theodicy, and Swinburne’s “Serious Free Will” theodicy that point to “greater goods” (e.g., “Incarnation and atonement,” “soul-making,” and “serious” libertarian free will) resulting from the evils in the world, thus denying that there are true “gratuitous” evils. William Rowe acknowledged: “The theist proposes to give a good reason for thinking that premise (1) [the Factual Premise] is false. And, of course, to the extent that theodicies do provide a good reason for rejecting premise (1), to that extent the theist will have pointed the way to reconciling the existence of God with the fact that our world contains the horrendous evils that it does.” William Rowe, “Evil, Evidence, and Skeptical Theism—A Debate,” 141–42.

<sup>128</sup> Joel T. Tierno, “On Defense as Opposed to Theodicy,” 167.

<sup>129</sup> Likewise, Alvin Plantinga’s “Free Will Defense” in the “Logical problem of evil” succeeds by merely showing weaknesses in the premises that “God is omnipotent and can prevent all evils, and God is omnibenevolent and wants to prevent all evils.”

<sup>130</sup> William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 58–59.

successful defense does not have to prove theism true and atheism false. Nor does it have to establish that the evils cited in a given antitheistic argument are logically consistent with God, or their occurrence is probable if God exists.”<sup>131</sup> It is sufficient for a defense to show that there is a flaw in the opponent’s premise (e.g., the Factual Premise), thus negating its inferred conclusion.

Nevertheless, the Skeptical Theism defense has its own problems.<sup>132</sup> First, it is extremely difficult to disprove the existence of “gratuitous” evils. The probability that all the seemingly “gratuitous” evils in the world are *all* non-gratuitous is remote. For example, let us assume that the death of person 1 in the Holocaust was probably (let us say 90% probability to be generous) justified (i.e., not a gratuitous evil) as he/she was a Christ believer and would go to heaven (i.e., the “greater good”). The death of person 2 in the Holocaust was also probably (90% probability of being non-gratuitous) justified as he/she was a Christian and would go to heaven and so on. The probability of ten people’s deaths in the Holocaust being *all* non-gratuitous evils is  $0.9 \times 0.9 \times 0.9 \times 0.9 \times 0.9 \times 0.9 \times 0.9 \times 0.9 \times 0.9 \times 0.9 = 0.348$ . The probability<sup>133</sup> of one million deaths

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<sup>131</sup> David O’Connor, *God and Inscrutable Evil*, 2.

<sup>132</sup> The “Skeptical Theism” defense is not without its problems. Dr. Rudavsky said: “This defense raises serious issues regarding our relationship with an omnipotent deity, as it eliminates the potential for a close relationship between humans and God . . . Further, how do we avoid having skeptical theism turn into global skepticism?” T. M. Rudavsky, “A Brief History of Skeptical Responses to Evil,” 381. Dr. Wilks added: “I see skeptical theism as posing a specific problem about the possibility of knowing God, and a general problem about the possibility of knowing anything at all.” Ian Wilks, “The Global Skepticism Objection to Skeptical Theism,” 459. Dr. O’Connor opined: “It seems to me that a philosophically minded, skeptical theist will find it plausible to think that the basic principles of her skepticism leave her without good reason for thinking that any actions are sins, no matter how awful those actions are in our estimation.” David O’Connor, “Theistic Objections to Skeptical Theism,” 473. Drs. Almeida and Oppy also raised the issue of a potential undermining of our moral obligation. “If we can assign no probability to the claim that there are great goods that are secured by our failure to prevent E (evil), then we cannot arrive at a reasoned view about whether or not to intervene to prevent E. And that’s not an acceptable result.” Almeida and Oppy, “Skeptical Theism and Evidential Arguments from Evil,” 516. However, Dr. Michael Rae disagreed: “My ultimate conclusion will be that none of these claims (global skepticism, skepticism about our obligation to prevent harm, skepticism about divine commands and values, skepticism about other knowledge of God) has been shown to be true.” Michael Rae, “Skeptical Theism and the ‘Too Much Skepticism’ Objection,” 487.

<sup>133</sup> See Dr. Hasker’s reasoning in “The Open Theist Response,” 158. Dr. Otte, in answer to Dr. Tooley’s “Carnapian construction,” a similar approach to Hasker’s probability calculation, argued: “Tooley needs to provide a reason to assign equal probability to the structure descriptions . . . The problem with this approach is that God’s reason for permitting one of these evils will most likely apply to other evils.” Richard Otte, “A Carnapian Argument from Evil,” 93.

in the Holocaust being *all* non-gratuitous evils is  $0.9^{1000000} = 0$ . Therefore, we would have to say that it is improbable that all the seemingly “gratuitous” evils over the centuries are *all* non-gratuitous. Second, the “Skeptical Theism Defense” is just that, a defense. No reasons are given to explain *why* God would allow evils in the world (except for “reasons beyond our ken”).<sup>134</sup> Thus, there is a gap in knowledge that needs to be filled, hopefully by a novel theodicy that we will propose in the following chapters. Let us now turn to the argument against Rowe’s second premise, the “Theological Premise.”

#### 2.4.3 Argument Against the Theological Premise

Rowe’s Theological Premise reads as follows:

“(2). An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.”<sup>135</sup>

Or for short,

(2’). If God exists, then there are no gratuitous evils (i.e., God prevents all gratuitous evils).

Rowe’s Theological Premise is countered by the Open Theism theodicy. Theodicy is a word coined by Gottfried Leibniz<sup>136</sup> from the Greek *theos* (God) and *dikaiosýni* (justice). “A theodicy replies to an argument from evil by giving a justifying reason for the existence of the evil in question – a reason such that, if it obtains, the permission of the evil by God is morally justifiable and does not constitute a reason to disbelieve in God’s existence or his goodness.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Bruce Russell, “Defenseless,” 197.

<sup>135</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” 336.

<sup>136</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*.

<sup>137</sup> William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 61. Dr. van Inwagen defined theodicy as: “Suppose I think I know what God’s reasons for allowing evil to exist are, and that I tell them to you. Then I have presented you with a theodicy.” Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, 65. We are adopting Hasker’s definition of theodicy.

To counter Rowe's Theological Premise, the theodicy needs to show some justifying reason(s) why God would allow gratuitous evils. Open Theism claims to provide such reasons.

#### 2.4.3.1. The Open Theism Theodicy

According to Open Theism (also known as Free Will Theism), God is in time and his omniscience does not include exhaustive, infallible knowledge of the future. Contrary to the classical understanding of omniscience, God has a "dynamic omniscience,"<sup>138</sup> and would know everything that could be known. However, the future is *not* something that can be exhaustively known, even by God. Open Theists "hold that much of the future is known by God as what *might happen*, and as what *will probably happen*, but not as what *will definitely* take place (emphases in original)."<sup>139</sup> Thus, "the future is composed of two parts, one part open to omniscience and the other part not. The part of the future that is not open to omniscience is the undetermined part, with future free actions being the prime and motivating example."<sup>140</sup> Future "free actions are not entities which can be known ahead of time. They literally do not yet exist to be known."<sup>141</sup> This is in sharp contrast with the orthodox understanding of God's omniscience, the belief that God has *complete knowledge* of all past, present, and future events either through foreordination or foreknowledge.

"Unlike process theists,<sup>142</sup> free will theists acknowledge that God can unilaterally intervene in earthly affairs and does so at times. But they deny that God can both grant

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<sup>138</sup> John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 279.

<sup>139</sup> William Hasker, "An Open Theist View," 60.

<sup>140</sup> Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*, 65.

<sup>141</sup> Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," 157.

<sup>142</sup> "Process Theology departs from traditional Christian beliefs mainly because of its view of the nature of God and His relationship to the universe . . . He (God) cannot control evil and cannot guarantee that it will ever be conquered." <https://www.theopedia.com/process-theology>. Dr. Keller opined: "Because God and nondivine actualities cocreate the world, God cannot guarantee any particular rate of progress toward goals." James Keller, "Process Theism and Theodicies for Problems of Evil," 347.

individuals freedom and control its use. Unlike theological determinists, they maintain that God has voluntarily given up complete control of earthly affairs to the extent that he has voluntarily granted humanity freedom.”<sup>143</sup> Again, this is contrary to the traditional understanding of God’s sovereignty and omnipotence, the belief that God is in *complete control* of all human events and actions.<sup>144</sup>

The argument by Open Theism against Rowe’s Theological Premise follows two lines of reasoning (i.e., free will and preservation of human morality) to show that God can exist with gratuitous evils (i.e., God does *not* prevent all gratuitous evils)

In the first line of reasoning, Open Theists claim that God can (and must) exist with gratuitous evils because he gives humans (and non-human beings) free will. They have the freedom to follow God (good) or resist him (evil). “If the world is indeed caught up in the middle of a real war between good and evil forces, evil is to be expected – including evil that serves no higher end. For in any state of war, gratuitous evil is normative.”<sup>145</sup> “The claim that God does and must prevent all genuinely gratuitous evils runs counter to God’s intention to make us responsible moral individuals.”<sup>146</sup> Gratuitous evils are the normal and expected consequences of the creation of beings with freedom and moral responsibility.

Concerning moral evil, God allows people to act in good as well as in evil ways.

“Frequent and routine intervention by God to prevent the misuse of freedom by his creatures

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<sup>143</sup> David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, 12.

<sup>144</sup> Dr. Geisler stated: “Sovereignty is God’s control over his creation.” Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, 536. Dr. Packer explained: “God as Lord and King in his world, the one who ‘worketh all things after the counsel of his own will’ (Eph 1:11), directing every process and ordering every event for the fulfilling of his own eternal plan.” J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 13–14. Arthur W. Pink affirmed: “To say that God is sovereign is to declare that he is the Almighty, the possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat his counsels, thwart his purpose, or resist his will.” A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 15.

<sup>145</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War*, 20.

<sup>146</sup> William Hasker, “An Adequate God,” 237.

and/or repair the harm done by this misuse would undermine the structure of human life.”<sup>147</sup>

However, God *does* occasionally act to prevent some evils. Dr. John Sanders said: “Most open theists hold that God does intervene in specific situations.”<sup>148</sup> Dr. William Hasker wrote:

“Couldn’t God do more in preventing particular instances of evil? Perhaps he could.”<sup>149</sup> Dr. Greg Boyd acknowledged that human self-determination “does not entail that God can never exercise coercive power in his interactions with free creatures.”<sup>150</sup>

Concerning natural evil, God allows indeterminate natural processes (Hasker’s “Natural Order Theodicy”)<sup>151</sup> to take place resulting in much good (e.g., rain and sunshine for the crops) and much gratuitous evil (e.g., floods and droughts). “If it is good that a world should exist with these structural features, it is also justifiable that the natural evils should be allowed to exist; they are, so to speak, the price of admission for the existence of such a world.”<sup>152</sup> Hasker argued that “there is a good measure of plausibility in applying it (a degree of independence) to nonpersonal agents.”<sup>153</sup> According to Dr. Boyd, Satan’s (and demons’) free will can also be implicated as the cause of gratuitous natural evils.<sup>154</sup>

Concerning animal suffering, God uses Darwinian evolution (e.g., the survival of the fittest with all its gratuitous evils and sufferings) to create “a complex, multileveled natural world, containing creatures that are sentient as well as some that are intelligent.”<sup>155</sup> The pains,

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<sup>147</sup> William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 74.

<sup>148</sup> John Sanders, “God, Evil, and Relational Risk,” 333.

<sup>149</sup> William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 76.

<sup>150</sup> Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 185.

<sup>151</sup> William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 63.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>154</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*. Dr. Plantinga also proposed that natural evil is the result of Satan’s and the demons’ free wills. “Natural evil is due to the free actions of nonhuman persons.” Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 58.

<sup>155</sup> William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 69.

sufferings, and deaths of countless animals over the millennia are justified by the eventual appearance of higher order sentient beings.

Thus, according to Open Theism, gratuitous evils are necessary for the exercise of (human and non-human) free will and the orderly function of indeterminate natural processes. God and gratuitous evils can exist together.

Maikel Siregar, a 15-year-old Christian boy, recounted his ordeal during the 2004 Indonesian tsunami.

*“One of the things I enjoy most is to go on morning walks with my mother. I will never forget that early morning walk with her on 26th December 2004. . . Suddenly, I felt the house and the ground shaking. I felt everything swaying from side to side with the rocking movement of the ground. Immediately I realized what was happening and I shouted, ‘Earthquake!! Earthquake!’ I called out to my mother, ‘Earthquake! Mom’. . . The tremor lasted about 40 minutes. But for me it seemed like it was four hours. Shortly after, many children and adults headed to the beach. I wondered what was happening. I asked a neighbor what was going on and he answered, ‘C’mon, let’s go and catch fish. The water leveling the sea has fallen all of a sudden and the sea seems to have dried up a long way out. A lot of fish are just flapping about on the seabed.’ I kept quiet, wondering how strange that was but also thinking how easy it was to get all kinds of fish for free. It was tempting, but somehow, I decided against joining them . . . We heard a commotion outside the house. People were running and shouting at the top of their voices, “Run! Water! Flood!” . . . We found ourselves trapped by the oncoming gigantic waves that were about 40 ft. high. It looked like a dragon about to swallow its prey . . . With a tremendous roaring sound, it smashed into us. There was no time to think. The next thing I knew, we were completely engulfed and swallowed up by this massive wall of black, muddy and oily*



*water . . . Slowly I managed to struggle for two hours through all the mud, rubble and debris and finally arrived at an emergency field hospital in utter exhaustion . . . My heart was broken when we finally accepted that my Mom had died in the tsunami . . . ‘Oh Mom, my dear, dear Mom, now your pain and sadness is [sic] over and your broken heart is finally healed. I know you won’t have to weep any more. In heaven you will have the true, true love of Jesus, the love that never fails, the love that never ends.’”<sup>156</sup>*

The 2004 Indonesian tsunami killed at least 225,000 people,<sup>157</sup> did 10 billion dollars in damage,<sup>158</sup> and left behind 150,000 orphaned children.<sup>159</sup> It is difficult to claim that the horrendous pains, unspeakable sufferings, and unfathomable death toll serve some “ultimate good.” As suggested by Open Theism, it appears that a good God *can* exist with gratuitous evils as a result of indeterminate natural processes (e.g., tsunami) and human free will (e.g., unwise decision to go fishing after an earthquake).

The second line of reasoning offered by Open Theism against Rowe’s Theological Premise is as follows. “If we know that God will permit a morally wrong action only if it results in a compensating good, then our motivation to take morality seriously as a guide to life is likely to be seriously impaired.”<sup>160</sup> Thus, “if I prevent some serious evil from occurring, I will actually prevent the greater good that, absent my interference, God would have brought about as a result of the evil in question. If, on the contrary, the evil would have no such good result, then God will not permit it, regardless of what I do or don’t do. The fail-safe option, then, is to do nothing.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Maikel Siregar, *Morning Walk*, [https://thoughts-about-god.com/stories/siragar\\_walk.htm](https://thoughts-about-god.com/stories/siragar_walk.htm)

<sup>157</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Indian-Ocean-tsunami-of-2004>

<sup>158</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/world/tsunami-of-2004-fast-facts/index.html>

<sup>159</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/indonesia/indonesia-150000-children-orphaned-tsunami-vp>

<sup>160</sup> William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 86.

<sup>161</sup> William Hasker, “The Open Theist Response,” 160.

For example, if we believe that God prevents *all* gratuitous evils, we will conclude that genocides (e.g., the Holocaust) are *not* gratuitous and we should therefore let them proceed without any interference so that we may obtain the “greater good.” Also, why should we bother to prevent evils like rapes, murders, child abuses . . . and thereby lose some greater good since the evils allowed by God are *never* gratuitous? Why not just do nothing (i.e., let evils proceed unchecked) and reap the “greater good”? However, “it is an extremely important part of God’s intention for human persons that they should place a high priority on fulfilling moral obligations and should assume major responsibility for the welfare of their fellow human beings.”<sup>162</sup> Thus, according to Open Theism, gratuitous evils are *necessary* to preserve human morality.

On October 2, 2006, Charles Roberts, a 32-year-old milk truck driver went to a one room schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, shot ten Amish girls (ages 6 to 13), killing five, and then committed suicide. His mother Terri reminisced about the nightmare.

*“On my lunch break at work, I heard sirens and wondered what could be happening in our small rural community. Just as I got back to my desk, my husband, Chuck, called. He asked me to come immediately to Charlie and Marie’s home. As soon as I got to his house and pushed through the crowd of police and reporters, I asked a trooper if my son was alive. ‘No, ma’am,’ he responded somberly. I turned to my husband. With pain in his eyes, he choked out, “It was Charlie. He killed those girls” . . . Later, anger set in, mixing with my pain. Where were you, God? I found myself screaming out in my head. How could you let this happen? I didn’t understand how Charlie could leave his children fatherless, to face the shame and the horror. And the gentle Amish families—what darkness had so possessed Charlie that he would want to*

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<sup>162</sup> William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 82.

*rip away daughters as precious as his own? . . . The next day, a group of Amish leaders walked into the yard of Marie's parents' house. Every one of them had a family member who had died in the schoolhouse. But they did not raise fists in fury. They reached to pull Marie's father into their embrace. Together, the families of the victims and the father-in-law of their killer wept and prayed . . . The Amish insisted that part of the funds donated to help the victims' families go to Marie and her children—for they'd lost a husband and father . . . Our son had taken the lives of their daughters. And here they were comforting us! It was a moment of sudden, healing clarity for me. Forgiveness is a choice. The Amish had made that very clear, but now I knew what it meant: Forgiveness isn't a feeling. These sweet parents were as grief-stricken as I was, their hearts broken like mine. I did not have to stop feeling anger, hurt and utter bewilderment at the horrific decisions Charlie had made. I only had to make a choice: to forgive. And I understood the other part of what the Amish had said: If we cannot forgive, how can we be forgiven?"<sup>163</sup>*

Human kindness and morality can thrive in the midst of gratuitous moral and natural<sup>164</sup> evils. Thus, in answer to Rowe, Open Theism claims that God will *not* prevent all gratuitous evils in order to: (1) preserve free will and (2) *not* undermine human morality. God can exist with gratuitous evils since “*it is good that there should be free, rational, and responsible persons.*”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> <https://www.womansday.com/life/inspirational-stories/a53626/terri-roberts-forgiven-excerpt/>

<sup>164</sup> “Within six months of the emergencies that arose from Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, U.S. donors wrote checks totaling \$4.2 billion, which we believe is the highest total ever.” <http://theconversation.com/american-generosity-after-disasters-4-questions-answered-83277>

<sup>165</sup> William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 71.

#### 2.4.3.2. Objections to the Open Theism Theodicy.

Concerning the first line of reasoning that gratuitous evils exist due to libertarian free will actions causing God to have occasional setbacks (i.e., “gratuitous evils”) in a “war between good and evil,” Dr. Bruce Ware commented: “A God lacking exhaustive foreknowledge is intrinsically and unavoidably fallible and faulty in making his future plans.”<sup>166</sup> Dr. Eleonore Stump questioned: “Could one trust such a God with one’s child, one’s life?”<sup>167</sup> The Open Theism view of God’s (limited) omniscience runs counter to most orthodox understandings of the subject.<sup>168</sup>

A second objection to Open Theism’s first line of reasoning is also raised. The evils resulting from free will are *not* really gratuitous as they serve a greater good (i.e., the greater good of free will). Dr. Feinberg’s third type of “gratuitous evils” addresses this issue. Evils occurring as a result of the “great good” of free will are not gratuitous as they serve an *antecedent* good. “An evil is gratuitous if it or its possibility has no antecedent good to which it is tied as an effect or by-product—presumably, the good that would cause it or is its concomitant would justify it.”<sup>169</sup> However, Dr. Hasker opined that “the intrinsic good involved in a person’s being free to choose on a particular occasion cannot reasonably be supposed to be so great that it outweighs severe evils that result from a morally wrong choice.”<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, the intrinsic good of free will enjoyed by a person *over a lifetime* may outweigh the occasional evils

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<sup>166</sup> Bruce Ware, “Defining Evangelicalism’s Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?” 198.

<sup>167</sup> Eleonore Stump, “Review of Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, and Mystery*,” 466.

<sup>168</sup> Critiques of the Open Theism position (Greg Boyd’s) can be found in David Hunt’s, William Lane Craig’s and Paul Helm’s responses in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, 48–64. Critiques of the Open Theism position (Greg Boyd’s) can also be found in Paul Helseth’s, William Lane Craig’s and Ron Highfield’s responses in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, 209–42. Critiques of the Open Theism position (Clark Pinnock’s) can be found in John Feinberg’s, Norman Geisler’s and Bruce Reichenbach’s responses in *Predestination & Free will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, 163–77. Critiques of the Open Theism position (William Hasker’s) can be found in Phillip Cary’s, William Lane Craig’s, Thomas Jay Oord’s and Stephen Wykstra’s responses in *God and the Problem of Evil: Five Views*, 131–50, 163–84.

<sup>169</sup> John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 273.

<sup>170</sup> William Hasker, “God and Gratuitous Evil,” 478.

committed. Thus, can one claim that such evils with an antecedent good (i.e., free will) are *truly gratuitous*?

Dr. Hasker stated: “Frequent and routine intervention by God to prevent the misuse of freedom by his creatures and/or to repair the harm done by this misuse would undermine the structure of human life and community intended in the plan of creation; accordingly, such intervention should not be expected to occur.”<sup>171</sup> It appears that the preservation of the “structure of human life and community” *justifies* the evils experienced in this world. If so, are they truly gratuitous? Dr. David Griffin concluded: “He (Hasker) is in fact arguing that even the gratuitous evils are not really gratuitous.”<sup>172</sup>

Dr. John Sanders wrote: “Open Theists believe that God is doing all he can, short of overriding his project, to prevent what evil he can, and for that evil that does occur, God works to bring good out of those situations (Rom 8:28).”<sup>173</sup> Thus, is there *any* true gratuitous evil in this world (with no antecedent or subsequent good) when God is done with his all-redemptive works?<sup>174</sup> And, if not, has Open Theism successfully challenged Rowe’s Theological Premise by showing that God does *not* prevent all gratuitous evils?

A third objection to the Open Theism premise that God allows gratuitous evils for the sake of libertarian free will is the sheer *excessive* amounts (and intensities) of such disasters.<sup>175</sup> Since God is omnibenevolent toward his creatures why does he permit so many horrendous evils

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<sup>171</sup> William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 74.

<sup>172</sup> David Ray Griffin, “Traditional Free Will Theodicy and Process Theodicy,” 223.

<sup>173</sup> John Sanders, “God, Evil, and Relational Risk,” 335.

<sup>174</sup> Of course, one can claim that the Open Theism God may *not* be successful in bringing good out of evil situations, thus resulting in gratuitous evils. However, this seems to contradict Romans 8:28, “God causes *all things to work together for good* to those who love God.”

<sup>175</sup> Note that this is a different issue, the problem of the *amount* of evils rather than the *existence* of gratuitous evils. A more complete theodicy should cover Rowe’s four problems of evil (the existence of God with any evil, different kinds of evils, various amounts of evils, and some particular evils). William Rowe, “Paradox and Promise: Hick’s Solution to the Problem of Evil,” 111–24.

in the world (e.g., the Rwandan genocide, The Las Vegas Massacre) when he can prevent them?

Dr. Klaas Kraay, commenting on Dr. Michael Peterson's Open Theism approach,<sup>176</sup> said:

“Peterson needs to show, in particular, that it is reasonable for him to insist that the amount of GME1 (gratuitous moral evil) actually found in the world is not excessive...(that) a deleterious effect on the “human drama”... would outweigh the benefits of God's prevention of all GNE1 (gratuitous natural evil).”<sup>177</sup> Do the benefits of free will outweigh its immense costs (e.g., the Holocaust, Hurricane Katrina)? Should the benevolent God not limit the amount of evils in this world to the absolute minimum necessary to obtain the desired goods (e.g., free will and the preservation of human morality)?

This brings us to Open Theism's second line of reasoning: the need to preserve human morality. According to Kraay,<sup>178</sup> Hasker's position on the preservation of morality can be summarized as follows:

- A. If God prevents all gratuitous evils, this fact is known or reasonably believed by us.<sup>179</sup>
- B. If we know or reasonably believe that God prevents all gratuitous evils, then our motivation to behave morally is undermined.<sup>180</sup>

Open Theism claims that God *must allow some* gratuitous evils to preserve our motivation to behave morally. However, while some gratuitous evils may indeed be required to preserve human morality, why is there such a horrendous *excess* of such evils (e.g., the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, the Rwandan genocide . . .)? Could not a lesser

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<sup>176</sup> Michael Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*.

<sup>177</sup> Klaas J. Kraay, “God and Gratuitous evil (Part I),” 905–12.

<sup>178</sup> Klaas J. Kraay, “God and Gratuitous evil (Part II),” 913–22.

<sup>179</sup> William Hasker, “The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil,” 37–39.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–29.

amount of evils bring about the same “greater good”? Are all the countless evils in this world absolutely necessary for “human morality”?<sup>181</sup>

Hasker explained that each *particular* evil of a class may not be necessary for the greater good (thus is gratuitous) but the class of evils is necessary and therefore not gratuitous. “The key to this solution is to distinguish the class of gratuitous evils from *particular instances* of that class (emphases in original).”<sup>182</sup> For example, the class of (E1, E2, E3, E4, and E5) as a group is necessary to bring about a greater good (e.g., morally responsible individuals) or is the result of a greater good (e.g., free will). However, E1 is not absolutely necessary and is therefore “gratuitous.” The class of (E2, E3, E4, and E5) without E1 can still bring about the same greater good or is the lesser evil result of a great good. Nevertheless, God “could not have prevented this class from having any members at all without losing a great good.”<sup>183</sup>

The question then becomes: “How small can the class be and yet have the *same* greater good?” William Rowe opined: “How far could the class of gratuitous evils be depleted without undermining significant morality? I would think a great deal.”<sup>184</sup> In other words, if E1 (and possibly E2, E3) was not necessary, why did the omnibenevolent God allow it? Would a class with just a minimum number of evils<sup>185</sup> (e.g., just E4 and E5) have the same greater good? But would the remaining evils (i.e., E4 and E5) then become absolutely necessary and would no

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<sup>181</sup> It is difficult to believe that God allows the Holocaust to *preserve* human morality. Rather, “the Holocaust teaches the lesson that human morality is a fragile concept, which can all too easily be eroded.” Fern Remedi-Brown, “Holocaust Lessons about Human Morality.” <http://guardianlv.com/2014/05/holocaust-lessons-about-human-morality/>

<sup>182</sup> William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 68.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> William Rowe, “Response to Hasker’s ‘The Necessity of Gratuitous Evils,’” presented at the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association in Chicago in April 1988. It is difficult to justify the sheer amount of horrendous evils in the world as the result of the preservation of human morality.

<sup>185</sup> Hasker calls the assumption of a particular minimum amount of evil “artificial and arbitrary.” William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 69. Concerning the “vagueness problem” and the “sorites argument,” Dr. Peter van Inwagen opined: “She (the atheist) is going to tell you that there is a non-arbitrary line for God to draw, and that it is the line that has the minimum number of horrors on the ‘actuality’ side. But there is no such line to be drawn.” Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, 106.

longer be “gratuitous”? Should the omnibenevolent God not adopt the “very least expensive, very least evil” option to bring about the same good? Why should a loving and good God even allow any “not necessary/gratuitous” evil? Dr. Wykstra observed: “If a doctor achieved the greater good of saving your life by amputating your legs but knew he could have equally well done this by giving you a simple antibiotic, you wouldn’t say he had ample *justifying reason* for the double amputation. You’d instead want him arrested (emphases in original).”<sup>186</sup> Does God really need that amount of gratuitous evils to preserve human morality?

To counter William Rowe’s argument that “a great deal” of evils could be eliminated without undermining morality, Hasker opined that if God kept removing some evils from the class of gratuitous evils, “a point would eventually be reached where no further evils could be eliminated without undermining morality. But at that point none of the remaining evils would be gratuitous.”<sup>187</sup> In other words, if all the remaining evils in the class are absolutely necessary for the greater good (i.e., the preservation of human morality), none of them would then be gratuitous, and our morality would thus be undermined (e.g., allowing child abuses to proceed for the sake of a “greater good”). Therefore, God *must* leave behind *some* “gratuitous” evils in the class so that our morality would be preserved.

According to Kraay, “Hasker’s strategy can appear paradoxical, even self-defeating.”<sup>188</sup> The claim that *some* “gratuitous” evils are left behind “necessarily” to preserve human morality is puzzling (i.e., evils being “gratuitous” yet “necessary” for the “greater good of morality”). “If God must permit gratuitous evils in order to prevent various goods from being undermined, then it seems as though these evils are no longer gratuitous.”<sup>189</sup> Thus, Hasker’s approach is self-

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<sup>186</sup> Stephen Wykstra, “The Skeptical Theist Response,” 174.

<sup>187</sup> William Hasker, *The Triumph of God over Evil*, 196.

<sup>188</sup> Klaas J. Kraay, “God and Gratuitous evil (Part II),” 915.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*



defeating since this is exactly what his opponent Rowe was arguing in his Theological Premise. All the remaining “gratuitous” evils left behind in the class (e.g., E4 and E5) are “necessary” and therefore *not* gratuitous,<sup>190</sup> thus confirming Rowe’s thesis that if God exists, there are *no* gratuitous evils.

Another objection to Hasker’s argument for gratuitous evils and the preservation of morality addresses his premise A above (i.e., “If God prevents all gratuitous evils, this fact is known or reasonably believed by us”). If we know that God would prevent all gratuitous evils, we might be tempted to do nothing. However, how do we know that God *does* prevent all gratuitous evils? Is this fact “known or reasonably believed by us”? If God wants to preserve human morality, “clearly the best course is not to make his presence and policy so decisively known that his very purposes for human life are undermined.”<sup>191</sup> “God will wait for the next life to provide us with a decisive knowledge of his nature and actions.”<sup>192</sup> Dr. David O’Connor stated: “God would only have to keep quiet on the point; lack of information, not disinformation.”<sup>193</sup> To preserve human morality, God should *not* reveal whether he prevents all gratuitous evils. This reasonable policy would definitely jeopardize Hasker’s premise A (i.e., if God prevents all gratuitous evils, this fact is known or reasonably believed by us).<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Dr. Craig wrote: “There must exist a certain amount of gratuitous evil in the world if the goodness of the world is not to be impaired.” William Lane Craig, “A Molinist View,” 53. However, are these evils truly gratuitous if they prevent the *impairment* of “the goodness of the world”?

<sup>191</sup> William Rowe, “Ruminations about Evil,” 85.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>193</sup> David O’Connor, “Theism and Gratuitous Natural Evil,” 502.

<sup>194</sup> Kraay pointed out that “if Rowe endorses the claim that God would ensure that we never discover his policy of preventing all gratuitous evil in this lifetime, Rowe can no longer reasonably assert premise 1 (the Theological Premise) of the argument for atheism at issue.” Klaas J. Kraay, “God and Gratuitous evil (Part II),” 915. Thus, if God hides his policy about the gratuitousness of evils, while Hasker’s premise A is undermined, Rowe’s Theological Premise will also be endangered (i.e., if God exists, then there are no gratuitous evils). We would not know whether there are true gratuitous evils or not.

Another objection to Hasker's argument for the preservation of morality addresses his premise B above (i.e., if we know or reasonably believe that God prevents all gratuitous evils, "then our motivation to behave morally is undermined"). Kraay observed that "perhaps there are theists whose moral motivations are undermined by their belief that God prevents all gratuitous evil. But this is quite irrelevant to the point emphasized by Hasker's critics, which is that many theists do *not* find this (emphasis in original)"<sup>195</sup> Dr. James Keller stated: "I do not think the consequences on human motivation would necessarily be as detrimental as Hasker argues. For at least many times some human(s) would have a moral obligation to do something about the evil situation."<sup>196</sup> Dr. David O'Connor concurred: "It does not follow, either, that moral motivation would be undermined by knowing that no natural evil is gratuitous."<sup>197</sup> Thus, Hasker's premise B, the theory that "our motivation to behave morally is undermined" by our knowledge that God prevents all gratuitous evils, is open to question.

Furthermore, Hasker acknowledged: "Couldn't God do more in preventing particular instances of evil? Perhaps he could, though we have little insight into what the consequences of more frequent divine intervention might be. The fact is that very often we *just do not know* why certain sorts of evil are permitted by God (emphases in original)."<sup>198</sup> Dr. Thomas Jay Oord observed: "All of this means that Hasker eventually appeals to mystery."<sup>199</sup> Thus, according to Hasker's Open Theism, the omnibenevolent God permits<sup>200</sup> "certain sorts of evil" (gratuitous or

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<sup>195</sup> Klaas J. Kraay, "God and Gratuitous evil (Part II)," 916.

<sup>196</sup> James Keller, *Problems of Evil and the Power of God*, 13.

<sup>197</sup> David O'Connor, "Theism and Gratuitous Natural Evil," 492. Dr. Hasker disagreed and argued against the "No Gratuitous Evil" principle. See William Hasker, "God and Gratuitous Evil," 473-87.

<sup>198</sup> William Hasker, "An Open Theist View," 76.

<sup>199</sup> Thomas Jay Oord, "The Essential Kenosis Response," 164.

<sup>200</sup> Dr. Oord opined: "The distinction between God's permitting and willing evil, however, is not helpful." Thomas Jay Oord, "An Essential Kenosis View," 78. Calvin said: "No distinction between God's will and God's permission! . . . why shall we say permission unless it is because God so wills?" John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.23.8.

otherwise, in excessive amounts or otherwise . . . ), for reasons unknown to us. How then can we be sure that some evils are indeed “gratuitous” (or “excessive”) if their underlying rationales are not identified? Has Open Theism proved its claim against Rowe that God does *not* prevent gratuitous evils in the world?<sup>201</sup>

In summary, it is arguable whether the Open Theism theodicy using its two lines of reasoning actually succeeds in refuting Rowe’s Theological Premise.<sup>202</sup> Nor can it be said that the theodicy satisfies other scholars in the field.<sup>203</sup> Attempts have also been made by Dr. Peter van Inwagen<sup>204</sup> and Dr. Michael Almeida<sup>205</sup> (among many others) to show that God and gratuitous evils can exist together. These theories have not been universally accepted.<sup>206</sup> Thus, a new theodicy that can explain *why* God allows gratuitous evils in this world would be a welcome addition to our current scholarship concerning the evidential problem of evil.

#### *2.4.4 Other Inductive Versions of the Evidential Problem of Evil.*

Rowe’s “Theological Premise” has been questioned by the “Open Theism Theodicy.” Rowe’s “Factual Premise” and its inductive step have been challenged by the “Skeptical Theism Defense.” Dr. Nick Trakakis commented on the controversy: “Although it might therefore be

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<sup>201</sup> Dr. Peterson commented that David O’Connor argued “in detail that Hasker has presented no good reason to think that theism and gratuitous evil are compatible.” Michael Peterson, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>202</sup> An omnipotent and omnibenevolent God would choose the “very least expensive, very least evil” option that would serve his purpose (e.g., giving humans libertarian free will and upholding their motivation to behave morally). However, in Open Theism, “not even God could determine for all future humans the minimum amount of gratuitous evil needed to motivate moral development.” James Keller, *Problems of Evil and the Power of God*, 13. The existence of gratuitous evils is still subject to debate.

<sup>203</sup> Other criticisms of Open Theism’s answer to the problem of evil can be found in Phillip Cary’s, William Lane Craig’s, Thomas Jay Oord’s and Stephen Wykstra’s responses in *God and the Problem of Evil*, 131–50, 163–84. Also see Paul Helm, “God’s Providence Takes No Risks,” 344–62.

<sup>204</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*. Dr. Sullivan wrote in support: “His (van Inwagen’s) overall approach offers us a model of providence where an all-powerful and morally perfect God must implement determinate policies in a world of intractable indeterminacy.” Meghan Sullivan, “Peter van Inwagen’s Defense,” 409.

<sup>205</sup> Michael Almeida, *Freedom, God, and Worlds*.

<sup>206</sup> Nick Trakakis, “God, Gratuitous Evil, and van Inwagen’s Attempt to Reconcile the Two,” 288–97. Klaas J. Kraay, “God and Gratuitous evil (Part II),” 913–22.

premature to declare any one side to the debate victorious, it can be concluded that, at the very least, Rowe's evidential argument is not as easy to refute as is often presumed."<sup>207</sup>

Other inductive versions of the "evidential problem of evil," aimed to show that the presence of evil makes it *improbable* that God exists, have also been proposed, namely Dr. Paul Draper's indirect inductive approach,<sup>208</sup> Dr. William Rowe's Bayesian probabilistic argument,<sup>209</sup> and Dr. Michael Tooley's Carnapian construction.<sup>210</sup> They have also met with significant challenges.<sup>211</sup>

Besides Open Theism, other theodicies have been offered to support the concept that God and evil can exist together.

## 2.5 Some Prominent Theodicies.

Many theodicies have been suggested for the evidential problem of evil. Only the more prominent theories will be discussed.

### 2.5.1 Plantinga's "Felix Culpa" Theodicy

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<sup>207</sup> Nick Trakakis, "The Evidential Problem of Evil."

<sup>208</sup> Dr. Draper's "Hypothesis of Indifference" (HI) is summarized as: "Neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human persons." Draper argues that HI "explains some significant set of facts about evil or about good and evil much better than theism does." Paul Draper, "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists," 331–50. Draper argues that "source physicalism" (or naturalism) is more probable than theism. Paul Draper, "God, Evil and the Nature of Light," 65–84. Also see Paul Draper, *God and Evil: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Dr. Draper followed Hume's argument that God is indifferent to good and evil in the world. "There may four hypotheses be framed concerning the first causes of the universe: that they are endowed with perfect goodness; that they have perfect malice; that they are opposite and have both goodness and malice; that they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the two former unmixed principles; and the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seem to oppose the third. The fourth, therefore, seems by far the most probable." David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part 11.

<sup>209</sup> William Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," 262–85.

<sup>210</sup> Michael Tooley, "Inductive Logic and the Probability that God Exists: Farewell to Skeptical Theism," 144–64.

<sup>211</sup> Michael Tooley, "The Problem of Evil." Peter van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," 135–65. Michael Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," 278–96. Richard Otte, "A Carnapian Argument from Evil," 83–97.

Dr. Plantinga wrote: “Evil arises from creaturely free will: God wanted a world in which there are free creatures who freely obey his commands and enter into personal relationship with him; but of course, whether a creature freely obeys God’s commands is not up to God.”<sup>212</sup> Besides the moral evils resulting from human free will, “much of the natural evil the world displays is due to the (free will) action of Satan and his cohorts.”<sup>213</sup> Nevertheless, the fall of humans is a “happy fault” (Felix Culpa in Latin) as it sets up the necessary circumstances for the “incomparably greater good” of the “divine incarnation and atonement.”<sup>214</sup> “If there were no evil, there would be no sin, no consequences of sin to be saved from, and hence no atonement. Therefore, a necessary condition of atonement is sin and evil.”<sup>215</sup>

Since God desires to show his great love and mercy by redeeming sinners (i.e., atoning for their sins), he chooses to create a world with sin, evil, and sufferings. Dr. Cary opined: “This means God chose for us a story in which we are sinners, justly punished in many ways for and by the consequences of our own sins, but also redeemed by the suffering of his own Son.”<sup>216</sup> A world with evil *and* the divine incarnation is much more valuable than a world with no suffering and no atonement. Dr. Goetz observed: “God’s ultimate justification for allowing libertarian free will and moral evil . . . explains the proximate or subsidiary aim that the great goods of incarnation and atonement be realized.”<sup>217</sup>

Furthermore, “there is a necessary condition of the goodness of truly good (highly eligible) possible worlds that is not and cannot be satisfied by Christ’s suffering; it requires

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<sup>212</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 366.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>214</sup> Evils in the world are therefore not gratuitous as they result in the greater good of the “incarnation and atonement.” Rowe’s Factual Premise is denied (i.e., There are *no* gratuitous evils).

<sup>215</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 373.

<sup>216</sup> Phillip Cary, “A Classic View,” 34.

<sup>217</sup> Stewart Goetz, “The Argument from Evil,” 492.

creaturely suffering as well. It is in this sense that Paul as well as the rest of us can fill up what is still lacking in regard to Christ's suffering."<sup>218</sup> Thus, we will all be blessed by sharing in Christ's afflictions on earth and, as the result, being more like him in heaven.

Several objections can be raised against the Felix Culpa view. Even if the "incomparably greater good" of the "divine incarnation and atonement" can only be obtained by the presence of (some) evil, why do we have such a horrendous excess of calamities in the world? Why is there a need for prolonged and atrocious sufferings (e.g., the Holocaust and the killing fields of Cambodia) to have a divine incarnation? Why does the atonement require Sue's rape, torture, and murder (E2)? What sins did five-year-old Sue commit that would warrant such gruesome evils? In what sense did Sue's excruciate sufferings "fill up what is lacking in regard to Christ's suffering"? Dr. Wykstra wondered: "If God is all-powerful, couldn't he have done it some other lower-cost way?"<sup>219</sup>

Furthermore, should people have the power and free will to do such horrible deeds to others? Is unfettered freedom so valuable that it would compensate for all the unspeakable evils perpetrated over the centuries? Why can't God (discreetly)<sup>220</sup> restrict human free will and limit the horrendous atrocities in the world? After all, a world with a reasonable amount of liberty (and less sufferings) would still allow a "divine incarnation and atonement"!

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<sup>218</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'" 375. According to various commentators, Colossians 1:24 does *not* imply that Christ's atonement on the cross was in some way deficient, requiring his followers to "fill up what is still lacking." <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/1-24.htm>. In any case, the apostle Paul could not possibly suggest that "creaturely suffering" is required of *non-Christians* in the world to "fill up what is still lacking in regard to Christ's suffering."

<sup>219</sup> Stephen Wykstra, "The Skeptical Theist Response," 175.

<sup>220</sup> For example, God could have warned the girl "Sue" (E2) of the danger, thus preventing the rape and murder without directly interfering with the attacker's free will.

As far as the need for “sharing” in the sufferings of Christ, should that not be a voluntary (free will) matter? Why should “Sue” be “forced” into such sufferings? Can we “opt out” of such “sharing” and settle for a less exalted position in heaven?

Concerning natural evils, how do we justify Bambi’s sufferings (E1)? Why does Bambi need a world with a “divine incarnation and atonement”? Does Bambi have “sins” that need to be atoned for? How likely is it that Bambi’s sufferings are “due to the actions of Satan and his cohorts”?<sup>221</sup> Why are there so many destructive natural evils<sup>222</sup> in the world since time immemorial (“nature red in tooth and claw”)?

Furthermore, what is the logical connection between Satan’s free will and the need for “the incarnation and atonement”? Since Christ did not die to atone for the fallen angels’ sins,<sup>223</sup> (moral and natural) evils perpetrated by Satan and his cohorts are *not* redeemed by and *not* necessary for the “incarnation and atonement.” Why then do we have such horrendous and excessive evils (e.g., the 2004 Indonesian tsunami with over 200,000 deaths)?

Can a world with divine incarnation, atonement, and horrendous evils be the best possible world?<sup>224</sup> Can God not “bypass” this evil realm/creation and proceed directly to the heavenly one

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<sup>221</sup> Plantinga acknowledged that “this suggestion is not at present widely popular in Western academia.” “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 377.

<sup>222</sup> Dr. David Johnson argued that the presence of natural evils suggests the hypothesis that “our universe was not designed by God and is instead, most likely, a computer simulation.” David Johnson, “Natural Evil and the Simulation Hypothesis,” 161–75.

<sup>223</sup> “For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16). Dr. Grudem wrote: “In fact, Heb 2:14–16 makes a clear distinction between our status as God’s children and the status of angels. Moreover, angels are nowhere else referred to as members of God’s family.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, footnote 3, 739.

<sup>224</sup> Leibniz believed that this world is the best possible world, as the omnibenevolent God must create the best world for his creatures. “I have gone even farther, in the work, and have even proved that this universe must be in reality better than every other possible universe.” Gottfried Leibniz, *Leibniz Selections*, 96. Leibniz also believes that this is the best possible way for God to fulfill his eternal plan. “The best plan is not always that which seeks to avoid evil, since it may happen that *the evil is accompanied by a greater good* (emphases in original).” Gottfried Leibniz, “Theodicy: A Defense of Theism,” 11. Plantinga claims that the end outcome (i.e., Christ’s incarnation and atonement) justifies the present evils. See Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 363–389. Also

where there is no sin and evil, where we will all see God face to face and enjoy his everlasting love?

Are the “divine incarnation and atonement” absolutely necessary for us to have eternal communion with God? Are evils and atonement required? Dr. Kevin Diller averred: “Perhaps it is the incarnation alone which wins for us the great enhancements in the intimacy of our relationship with God . . . But the incarnation alone does not require suffering and evil, so neither then is evil required for enhancing the intimacy of human relationship with God.”<sup>225</sup> Thomas Aquinas affirmed: “Even had sin not existed, God could have become incarnate.”<sup>226</sup> If so, can we dispense with sin and atonement and just enjoy Christ’s divine incarnation and presence?

Furthermore, why would God allow the Fall if he desired to have a *continued* kinship with humans? Dr. Diller observed: “If right relationship with God is the primary locus of value for the state of affairs that make a world great, then the *Felix Culpa* view, it seems to me, would have little to commend it.”<sup>227</sup> Dr. John Bishop said: “God’s interpersonal relationship with created persons caught up in these horrors is thus forever characterized by the feature that he was the ultimate author of the suffering from which he redeems them. But God’s having such an interpersonal relationship with created persons arguably *falls short of his perfect goodness* (emphases mine).”<sup>228</sup> How could an interrupted relationship (resulting in countless, horrendous

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see Phillip Cary, “A Classic View,” 13–36. “Possibly, God could not have actualized a normally perfect world; or a world containing less evil than the actual world.” Frederick Kroon, “Plantinga on God, Freedom, and Evil,” 89.

<sup>225</sup> Kevin Diller, “Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good World?” 403.

<sup>226</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3.1.3.

<sup>227</sup> Kevin Diller, “Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good World?” 398. Would God foreordain humans to fall so that he can rush in to rescue them (a type of Munchausen syndrome by proxy)? Dr. Plantinga provided some answers to this objection. Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa’” 382–86.

<sup>228</sup> John Bishop, “On Identifying the Problem of Evil,” 52.



evils on earth) be better than an unbroken fellowship between Creator and creatures in the garden of Eden?

Also, does the “atonement” apply to everyone’s sins, including those who do not believe in Christ (e.g., Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Atheists . . .)? And if it does not apply to them, will they suffer excruciating evils for nothing? Will all relationships be restored, or will they be ruptured for eternity?

Diller also questioned “Plantinga’s strategy of interpreting evil as a means to God’s far greater ends. Diller argued that this makes evil a functional good, somehow rational and fitting in God’s economy, thus distorting its true theological significance as needless and harmful.”<sup>229</sup> Is it true that there are no real “gratuitous evils” in this world, that every evil serves some “greater good”? Is the Holocaust a “functional good,” an *absolute* requirement for the “divine incarnation and atonement”? Plantinga acknowledged: “The Felix Culpa approach does not dispel all the perplexity surrounding human suffering and evil; I suppose nothing can do that.”<sup>230</sup> Other philosophers and theologians tend to agree.<sup>231</sup>

### 2.5.2 Hick’s “Soul-Making” Theodicy.

Dr. John Hick wrote: “Whereas the Augustinian theology sees our perfection as lying in the distant past, in an original state long since forfeited by the primordial calamity of the fall, the

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<sup>229</sup> Michael Peterson, “Introduction,” 9.

<sup>230</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 386.

<sup>231</sup> Kevin Diller, “Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good World?” 390–409. Marilyn McCord Adams, “Plantinga on Felix Culpa: Analysis and Critique,” 123–40. William Lane Craig, William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord and Stephen Wysktra responded to Phillip Cary’s view of “Felix Culpa” in *God and the Problem of Evil*, 143–84.

Irenaean<sup>232</sup> theology sees our perfection as lying before us in the future, at the end of a lengthy and arduous process of further creation through time.”<sup>233</sup> Thus, a human is not created perfect and complete. He is a “work in progress” who lives in a “vale of soul-making,”<sup>234</sup> where evils and sufferings are necessary for the long process of spiritual maturity, a journey that will continue even in the afterlife when “God will eventually succeed in His purpose of winning all men to Himself.”<sup>235</sup> “We cannot say in advance *how* God will eventually free all created souls from their bondage to sin and establish them in love and glad obedience towards Himself; but despite the logical possibility of failure, the probability of His success amounts, as it seems to me, to a practical certainty (emphasis in original).”<sup>236</sup> Human sufferings will not be in vain, evils are not gratuitous and pointless for God in his mercy and love will bring universal salvation<sup>237</sup> to all people, if not in this life than definitely in the next.

As to why God creates humans as works in progress, Hick averred: “The answer centers upon the positive value of human freedom . . . a human goodness that has come about through the making of free and responsible moral choices, in situations of real difficulty and temptation, is intrinsically more valuable—perhaps even limitlessly more valuable—than a goodness that has been created readymade, without the free participation of the human agent.”<sup>238</sup> God is not interested in creating “perfect robots” for he desires to have free beings<sup>239</sup> who *voluntarily*

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<sup>232</sup> Dr. Mark Scott argued that Hick’s theodicy “has more affinity with Origen than with Irenaeus.” Mark Scott, “Suffering and Soul-Making: Rethinking John Hick’s Theodicy,” 314.

<sup>233</sup> John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 45.

<sup>234</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 253.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>237</sup> Dr. John Bishop said: “If God *is* a supreme personal agent, there would be a defect in either his power or goodness if he could not provide for universal salvation (emphasis in original).” John Bishop, “On Identifying the Problem of Evil and the Possibility of Its Theist Solution,” 51.

<sup>238</sup> John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 44.

<sup>239</sup> Dr. Hick wrote: “Whilst a free action arises out of the agent’s character it does not arise in a fully determined and predictable way.” John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 276.

choose valuable “soul-making” options to grow and love him during their pilgrimage on this earth and in the world to come.

“The other consideration is that if men and women had been initially created in the direct presence of God (who is infinite in life, power, goodness, and knowledge) they would have no genuine freedom in relation to their Maker. In order to be fully personal and therefore morally free beings, they have accordingly (it is suggested) been created at a distance from God – not a spatial but an *epistemic distance*, a distance in the dimension of knowledge (emphases mine).”<sup>240</sup> Thus, “one has a genuine freedom in relation to one’s Maker and can freely develop, in response to God’s noncoercive presence, toward one’s own fulfillment as a child of God.”<sup>241</sup> The concept of an epistemic distance from God is central to the preservation of human freedom and moral responsibility.

Natural evil also plays a crucial role in “soul making” since “only a world that has this general character could constitute an effective environment for the second stage (or the beginning of the second stage) of God’s creative work, whereby human animals are being gradually transformed through their own free responses into ‘children of God.’”<sup>242</sup> “It (our world) must operate according to general and dependable laws, and it must present real dangers, difficulties, problems, obstacles, and possibilities of pain, failure, sorrow, frustration, and defeat.”<sup>243</sup> Natural laws and their consequent natural evils are part of God’s “creative work” to transform immature beings into the desired exalted status of “children of God.”

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<sup>240</sup> John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 44.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

Numerous objections have been raised against Dr. John Hick's "soul-making" theodicy. Hick's call for a libertarian free will may raise some conflict with his commitment to universal salvation. Dr. Speak opined: "Hick recognizes that there is some potential philosophical slippage between his position here (optimistic eschatology) and his commitment to libertarian free will. Still, he argues that an omnibenevolent God will eventually be able to draw each individual into the beatific vision by a process that respects human freedom."<sup>244</sup> It appears that God, in order to provide an ultimate "soul-making" in the hereafter and an eventual universal salvation, may have to overcome humans' libertarian free will in case of stubborn resistance. It is questionable whether such a unilaterally determined process to draw all people "into the beatific vision" could be accomplished with full respect for human freedom.

Dr. Stanley Kane observed: "Soul-making, Hick teaches, requires the development of such traits as fortitude, courage, compassion . . . We can imagine situations where these traits could be displayed even though there is no actual evil existing . . . for example . . . competing in the Olympic Games."<sup>245</sup> Thus, fortitude and courage can be acquired without the need for horrendous moral (e.g., the Holocaust) or natural (e.g., Hurricane Katrina) evils. One can quibble that the depth of character building may be lessened without the presence of such evils. However, does this difference "outweigh the disvalue of all the pain and suffering that ever have and ever will occur as a result of diseases, natural disaster"?"<sup>246</sup>

Also, as there is no evil in heaven, courage and fortitude developed at great cost and dreadful suffering (e.g., Rwanda's genocide) would be of no further use in the afterlife. Dr. Stanley Kane remarked: "If the final state were one in which these qualities would be extensively

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<sup>244</sup> Daniel Speak, "Free Will and Soul-Making Theodicies," 210.

<sup>245</sup> G. Stanley Kane, "The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy," 2.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

used in practice, then it would be reasonable to make it the duty of men to develop them before they could be admitted to the perfect state. But it is not. Instead it is a state in which it will be logically impossible for men to use them.”<sup>247</sup> In heaven, qualities such as perseverance in the face of unspeakable evils would be superfluous. Dr. Eleonore Stump added: “And if it is the possession rather than the manifestation of these character traits which is valued . . . then it is not clear why God could not have imparted the disposition without the evil . . . I think Hick has no good answers to these questions.”<sup>248</sup>

Furthermore, “the plausibility of Hick’s soul-making theodicy depends on the viability of the doctrine of universal salvation. It is the linchpin of his entire theory. The eternal loss of a single soul would permanently inscribe evil into the cosmos and negate the soul-making function of suffering. Without universal salvation, suffering would be rendered unjust, unredemptive, and meaningless and the soul-making process would fail.”<sup>249</sup> Universalism/universal salvation is by no means widely accepted by theologians or philosophers.<sup>250</sup> Moreover, if we are all guaranteed salvation, would we not prefer to dispense with some or most of the arduous and painful process of soul-making in this “vale” of suffering and proceed immediately to the promised maturity and blessing in the afterlife<sup>251</sup> (e.g., by suicide or euthanasia)?

Also, Hick’s “soul-making” does not address the problem of animal suffering (e.g., “Bambi,” E1) as they do not have souls “to make.” Hick acknowledged: “This explanation (soul-

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 12–13.

<sup>248</sup> Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 397.

<sup>249</sup> Mark Scott, “Suffering and Soul-Making: Rethinking John Hick’s Theodicy,” 331.

<sup>250</sup> Robin Perry and Christopher Partridge, eds. *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*.

<sup>251</sup> Hick called this state “the endless enjoyment of that fullness of life and joy, beyond our present imaginations, which is the eventual fulfillment of God’s love toward us.” John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 46.

making theodicy) cannot cover the lower animals, lacking as they do a rational and moral nature. Their existence remains as a problem.”<sup>252</sup>

In his theodicy, Hick asserted that evils are absolutely necessary (therefore non-gratuitous) for the process of soul-making in this world. William Rowe agreed that soul-making may be a good reason for God to allow even “excess evils” for “if we were to believe that each evil that occurs is one that even an omnipotent being could not prevent without loss of soul-making, we would make no significant efforts to overcome such evils.”<sup>253</sup> However, “it not only seems obvious to us that evil occurs far in excess of what an omnipotent being would have to permit for soul-making; it also seems obvious to us that evil occurs far in excess of what an omnipotent being would have to permit for us to be rational in believing that excess evil occurs . . . Hick’s argument does not solve the problem of the amount, intensity and distribution of evil in our world.”<sup>254</sup> Dr. Mark Maller opined: “God could and should have limited the human propensity for evil, at least slightly, and could have prevented even a minority of natural disasters or their effects, and there would still be *more* than ample opportunity to develop morally virtuous souls and God’s plan would still work (emphasis in original).”<sup>255</sup> The sheer overabundance of incomprehensible moral and natural evils, the unspeakable atrocities perpetrated on the youngest, most innocent members of society (with little possibility of soul making as with “Sue” in E2), and the seeming gratuitousness of horrendous, protracted

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<sup>252</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 314.

<sup>253</sup> William Rowe, “Paradox and Promise: Hick’s Solution to the Problem of Evil,” 119.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>255</sup> Mark Maller, “Animals and the Problem of Evil in Recent Theodicies,” 3. Dr. Joseph Lynch wrote: “The existence of any natural evil, including animal pain, is evidence against theism.” Joseph Lynch, “Theodicy and Animals,” 9.

sufferings call into question the problematic thesis of a tortuous and painful “soul-making” journey to a distant goal of eventual maturity.

Rowe also raised some concerns about Hick’s concept of “epistemic distance” (i.e., “that the world appears to finite minds as if there is no God”).<sup>256</sup> Rowe contended that “while I fully agree with Hick that epistemic distance from God is necessary to cognitive freedom in relation to God, I can find no good reasons in Hick’s writing to support his further claims that epistemic distance from God is necessary for the very existence of human persons, for their being free to develop morally, and for their being free with respect to coming to love God.”<sup>257</sup> Dr. Peterson opined: “William Rowe points out that epistemic distance from God is not necessary for moral and spiritual freedom, since it is *possible* for creatures to fully know that God exists and yet make their own choices to move toward or away from God (emphasis mine).”<sup>258</sup>

Furthermore, do evil and sufferings always result in “soul-making” rather than “soul-destroying”? Hick acknowledged: “Life’s pains and agonies, which sometimes help to create stronger and more compassionate men and women, at other times overwhelm and crush, leaving only despair, tragedy and disintegration.”<sup>259</sup> In the face of horrendous evils and unjust sufferings, Hick averred: “The mystery of dysteleological<sup>260</sup> suffering is a real mystery impenetrable to the rationalizing human mind.”<sup>261</sup> Dr. Mark Maller observed: “Hick’s admission that so much human suffering is a mystery hardly helps resolve this crisis of evil.”<sup>262</sup> In summary, Hick’s

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<sup>256</sup> Michael Peterson, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>257</sup> William Rowe, “Paradox and Promise: Hick’s Solution to the Problem of Evil,” 116.

<sup>258</sup> Michael Peterson, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>259</sup> John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 360.

<sup>260</sup> Dysteleology: absence of purpose in nature. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dysteleology>

<sup>261</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 335.

<sup>262</sup> Mark Maller, “Animals and the Problem of Evil in Recent Theodicies,” 2.

“soul-making” theodicy, due to its many shortcomings, has not been widely accepted as a total answer to the problem of evil.<sup>263</sup>

### 2.5.3 Swinburne’s “*Serious Free Will Theodicy*.”

Dr. Richard Swinburne argued that “most theists need a theodicy, an account of reasons why God might allow evil to occur. Without a theodicy, evil counts against the existence of God.”<sup>264</sup> A theodicy needs to provide sufficient moral reasons for an omnibenevolent God to allow the excessive and appalling evils in this world. “Just reflect on some of the horrors that we read about in our newspapers and history books: the prolonged cruelty of parents to lonely children, the torture of the innocent, the long drawn-out acute physical pain of some disease and so on. If we cannot see all that as a reason for believing that there is no all-good and all powerful being, when we cannot think of any reason why such a being should allow it all to happen, there really is something deeply wrong with us.”<sup>265</sup> Applying the Principle of Credulity,<sup>266</sup> “a principle which allows one to infer from the fact that it seems to a person that something is present to the probability that it is present,”<sup>267</sup> Swinburne averred that the burden of proof is on the theist to provide an adequate *total theodicy* to justify his/her belief in the existence of God (in the presence of horrendous evils), a task that Swinburne subsequently performed in great details by enumerating all the possible goods and evils, their respective values, the various situations where they interact with the goal of showing that God is right in allowing evils for the sake of the

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<sup>263</sup> Other critiques of Hick’s “soul-making” theodicy can also be found in the following articles. Klaas J. Kraay, “God and Gratuitous evil (Part I),” 905–12. Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 392–423. Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil.” Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil.”

<sup>264</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, x.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>266</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 293–327.

<sup>267</sup> Michael Martin, “The Principle of Credulity and Religious Experience,” 79.



greater goods.<sup>268</sup> The burden of creating such an exhaustive total theodicy covering all the facets of good and evil and answering all the questions on the contentious subject is not accepted or felt to be necessary by many theists.<sup>269</sup>

First, in his complex theodicy, Swinburne claimed that humans have libertarian free will,<sup>270</sup> that God lacks complete foreknowledge of the future<sup>271</sup> (i.e., a tenet of Open Theism),<sup>272</sup> and that “serious”<sup>273</sup> free will leading to the great good of free moral choices<sup>274</sup> entails false beliefs and bad desires. “Every moral evil in the world is such that God allowing it to occur makes possible (given the assumption that humans have free will) the great good of a particular choice between good and bad. Every bad desire facilitates such a choice. Every false belief makes possible the great good of investigation, especially cooperative investigation, and the great good of some of us helping others toward the truth.”<sup>275</sup> Serious free will entails agents having desires for good as well as for evil actions. “After all, without a desire for the lesser action, there would be no serious choice to be made . . . Likewise, there is great value in finding

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<sup>268</sup> “The evils, moral and natural, which I have considered in part III are, as far as I can see, all the ones there are, and of each one of them it is the case that by allowing it to occur God makes possible a good which he could not make possible without allowing it (or an equally bad state) to occur.” Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 223.

<sup>269</sup> “It is wrongheaded at a very fundamental level of thinking that because a given defense or theodicy doesn’t solve every problem of evil, it doesn’t solve any problem of evil.” John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 27. “So wise theodicies will not be too ambitious. They will be hesitant in offering reasons that justify God, lest they be bereft of reasons for hope.” Phillip Cary, “The Classic Response,” 131. “I think we should conclude that the requirement of a successful theodicy for the rationality of theistic belief has not yet been demonstrated.” Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 112.

<sup>270</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 105–106.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 131–34.

<sup>272</sup> “I cover the views concerning simultaneous causation of three significant open theists: Richard Swinburne, Peter van Inwagen and William Hasker.” Benjamin Arbour, “When Does God Know?” 112.

<sup>273</sup> “Freedom to choose between goods of different value, he (Swinburne) calls ‘unserious free will,’ whereas freedom to choose between good and evil he calls ‘serious free will.’” Atle Søvik, *The Problem of Evil and the Power of God*, 178. Thus, if humans are only offered good alternatives (e.g., choices between two good paying jobs), their free will, although free, is “unserious” since no “evil,” “bad” choice is given for their consideration. “Serious free will” requires an opportunity to make a decision between good and evil actions (e.g., go to work to earn a living or rob a bank for money).

<sup>274</sup> Unlike other open theists, Swinburne does not advocate the existence of gratuitous evils.

<sup>275</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 217.

things out, in cooperative investigation, and in helping others in finding the truth. But in order for these goods to become real, ignorance and false belief are required.”<sup>276</sup> Bad desires and false beliefs, although “bad” in themselves can serve the “greater good” and are therefore indispensable in the exercise of “serious” free will. “Thus, not even an omnipotent being can completely eliminate two sorts of (typically natural) evil, false moral beliefs and bad desires, without either eliminating all but very unserious free will.”<sup>277</sup>

Besides moral evil, Swinburne also developed a “free will theodicy for natural evil,” suggesting “that free will cannot be had without the knowledge of how to bring about evil (or prevent its occurrence) and since this knowledge of how to cause evil can only be had through prior experience with natural evil, it follows that the existence of natural evil is a logically necessary condition for the exercise of free will.”<sup>278</sup> Thus, “we could not know the consequences of our choices, according to Swinburne, without the existence of natural evil. Unless someone dies accidentally of cyanide poisoning, for example, or unless people died of rabies, we would not have the significant choice of trying to prevent cyanide poisoning or rabies.”<sup>279</sup> Natural evil is an integral part of a “serious” exercise of libertarian free will, a great good that would outweigh on balance all the evils and sufferings in the world.<sup>280</sup> Furthermore, Swinburne “attempted to justify the suffering and deaths of animals by arguing that it is necessary for some of them to get caught in a forest fire, using William Rowe’s much discussed fawn example, so

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<sup>276</sup> René Van Woudenberg, “A Brief History of Theodicy,” 189.

<sup>277</sup> Paul Draper, “Review: Providence and the Problem of Evil by Richard Swinburne,” 459.

<sup>278</sup> Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil.”

<sup>279</sup> Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 395–96.

<sup>280</sup> While natural evil (e.g., natural selection, survival of the fittest) can be used as an argument against theism, Dr. Nagasawa maintained that “because their (the atheists’) ontology is much more limited . . . the problem of evil . . . provides a reason to give up atheism and a motivation to adopt theism.” Yujin Nagasawa, “The Problem of Evil for Atheists,” 161–62.

that others can be warned to avoid the fires.”<sup>281</sup> Thus, “fawns are bound to get caught in forest fires sometimes if other fawns are to have the opportunity of intentionally avoiding fires, and if deer are to have opportunities of rescuing other fawns from fires.”<sup>282</sup> Swinburne stated: “I conclude that the suffering of fawns not readily rescueable is necessary for the great good of humans and deer helping fawns.”<sup>283</sup> Natural evils are therefore *necessary* for people and animals to gain knowledge of their environment and, as a result, act freely, wisely, and circumspectly.

Second, besides the claim that libertarian free will<sup>284</sup> is *intrinsically* worthwhile in the presence of moral and natural evils, Swinburne also asserted that its value lies in “our ability to exercise it in significant ways in the ‘choice of destiny and responsibility.’ Without significant exercise of free will, Swinburne argues, we would live like God’s pets, inhabiting a toy world.”<sup>285</sup> “The more *responsibility* agents have, both for their own well-being and for the well-being of others, the more valuable their free will is.”<sup>286</sup> Thus, the exercise of “serious free will,” even at the cost of significant harm to others, must be allowed by God in a “real” (i.e., not toy) world. “Swinburne’s idea is that if the possible actions that are open to one vary enormously in moral worth, then libertarian free will is very valuable indeed, whereas if the variation in the moral status of what one can do is very limited, then libertarian free will adds much less to the world.”<sup>287</sup> The greater breadth of moral choices ranging from the infinitely good (e.g., Mother Teresa’s life work) to the infinitely evil (e.g., Hitler’s Holocaust) is much more valuable than the

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<sup>281</sup> Mark Maller, “Animals and the Problem of Evil in Recent Theodicies,” 9.

<sup>282</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 172.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>284</sup> Contrary to Swinburne, Dr. Pereboom, a free will skeptic, “denies that we have the sort of free will required for us to be responsible for our action in the basic desert sense.” Nevertheless, there are some “defense hypotheses (Hick’s, Adams’s and Stump’s) the free will skeptic can accept, and which are compatible with morality” as they “are independent of this sort of free will.” Derk Pereboom, “A Defense Without Free Will,” 412–22.

<sup>285</sup> Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 395.

<sup>286</sup> Paul Draper, “Review: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* by Richard Swinburne,” 462.

<sup>287</sup> Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil.”

restricted boundary of choices confined to the somewhat good (e.g., say “thank you”) and the mildly bad (e.g., tell a white lie).

“The third criterion of Swinburne’s principle of divine justification is that the expected value of God’s allowing an evil, given that God does everything he can to bring about the goods for the sake of which that evil is allowed, must be greater than zero.”<sup>288</sup> In Swinburne’s theodicy, one must carefully weigh the totality of goods against the totality of evils in the world and arrive at a positive number to provide a divine justification for all the pains and sufferings of sentient beings over the centuries. “God has the right to allow such evils to occur, so long as the goods are facilitated and the evils are limited and compensated in the way that various other Christian doctrines (of human free will, life after death, the end of the world, etc.) affirm. And I shall conclude by claiming that the good states which (according to Christian doctrine) God seeks are so good that they outweigh the accompanying evils.”<sup>289</sup> Furthermore, “He (God) allows suffering at most for the short period of our earthly life in order that in that life we may help others and form ourselves in deeply significant ways – and we would be poorer without those opportunities.”<sup>290</sup> Therefore, “the obligation to obey God arises because the life which God gives us is on balance a good thing . . . if there are humans whose life on earth is not on balance good, then God will have to give them a good life after death of sufficient length and quality to outweigh the overall badness of their life on earth.”<sup>291</sup> Thus, evil, in the end, will be overcome by the good God has in store for his creatures in the afterlife.

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<sup>288</sup> Paul Draper, “Review: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* by Richard Swinburne,” 466.

<sup>289</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, x.

<sup>290</sup> Richard Swinburne, “The Problem of Evil,” 31.

<sup>291</sup> Richard Swinburne, “Replies,” 219.

Swinburne's theodicy has been subjected to many criticisms. As discussed before, Open Theism with its emphasis on God's incomplete foreknowledge of the future (Swinburne's impossibility of "incorrigible knowledge")<sup>292</sup> has not been accepted by mainstream Christianity and is questionable as a defense against Rowe's Theological Premise.

Concerning moral evils, Swinburne claimed that "serious free will" *necessarily* entails bad desires and false beliefs. The assertions that "every bad desire facilitates such a choice" (i.e., between good and bad), and that "every false belief makes possible the great good of investigation, especially cooperative investigation"<sup>293</sup> are debatable. Dr. Paul Draper argued:

*"For sometimes we have a bad desire without having (or believing we have) any action open to us that could satisfy or help us satisfy that desire . . . other times we have a desire to perform a bad action, but also a stronger desire to perform an alternative action that we believe to be overall best. And in still other situations our strongest desire, though bad, is a desire to perform an action that we mistakenly believe to be better than any alternative action open to us . . . these are all cases in which bad desires do not make possible free choices between good and bad."*<sup>294</sup>

Bad desires do not necessarily facilitate a free will choice (e.g., jailed criminals who daydream about robbing banks have no choice, no possibility of action to satisfy that desire), and false beliefs do not always make possible "the great good of investigation," bringing people "toward the truth" (e.g., Nazi fanatics are entrenched in their false beliefs). Furthermore, "Swinburne is committed to the position that, if suffering can lead to (freely chosen) repentance, it is only because it can affect our desires or our beliefs . . . But this doesn't explain why God might allow

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<sup>292</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 131–32.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>294</sup> Paul Draper, "Review: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* by Richard Swinburne," 459–60.

such suffering . . . He could just directly cause a change in our desires or beliefs.”<sup>295</sup> Pain and suffering are *not* absolutely necessary for the exercise of serious free will.<sup>296</sup>

Concerning natural evils, Dr. Eleonore Stump opined: “Contrary to Swinburne, I think that the knowledge Swinburne values does not require natural evils; it can be acquired in a number of other ways. In particular, for example, God could inform men, directly or indirectly, of the consequences of their choices . . . the world would contain ample opportunity for significant exercise of free will even without natural evil.”<sup>297</sup> We do not need to be reminded *every single year* that tornadoes are deadly or that earthquakes are life-threatening. Such knowledge has been ingrained in us since time immemorial. The natural evils we experience in this world are clearly excessive and seemingly purposeless. Furthermore, many of the goods “Swinburne uses to explain natural evils do not apply to animal suffering that humans cannot prevent, which is most of the suffering in the world.”<sup>298</sup> Also, “the fact is that fawns and members of numerous other species are warned by their natural instincts by the sight and smell of smoke and fire to avoid going in, and so it is unnecessary to witness other deer or animals caught and suffer in them.”<sup>299</sup> Do animals need *frequent and recurrent* devastating forest fires to realize that flames can burn and kill? Stump concluded: “So I think Swinburne’s solution cannot justify the natural evils of this world.”<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 460–61.

<sup>296</sup> Swinburne responded with the Principle of Honesty. God could create a world without real pain, suffering, and evil. He “could of course arrange things so that our bad choices never had any effects . . . (However) God has an obligation not to make a world in which agents are systematically deceived on important matters without their having the possibility of discovering their deception.” Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 138–39. Whether such an obligation exists is debatable.

<sup>297</sup> Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 396.

<sup>298</sup> Paul Draper, “Review: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* by Richard Swinburne,” 464.

<sup>299</sup> Mark Maller, “Animals and the Problem of Evil in Recent Theodicies,” 9.

<sup>300</sup> Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 396.

Concerning the value of a wide range of available actions for the exercise of a “serious free will,” Dr. Michael Tooley observed: “If what matters is simply the existence of alternative actions that differ greatly in moral value, this can be the case even in a world where one lacks the power to inflict great harm on others, since there can be actions that, rather than inflicting great sufferings on others, would instead benefit others enormously, and which one could either perform or intentionally refrain from performing.”<sup>301</sup> Thus, “even if it true that ‘All past and present human and natural evils of which we know . . . contribute to the widening of human choice when we learn about them,’ it is plainly false that all such widening is intrinsically valuable.”<sup>302</sup> Does “serious free will” justify the unspeakable atrocities committed in the Holocaust, the genocides, the gang rapes, or the abuses of children? Dr. Derk Pereboom argued: “The claim that it is more valuable than not for people to have a strong desire to abuse children for the reason that this gives them the opportunity to choose freely not to do so has no plausibility for us . . . It is therefore dubious that God would allow such desires in order to realize the value of certain free choices.”<sup>303</sup> The benefits of a widening of the range of options to include utterly depraved actions like genocides, gang rapes, and child abuses can hardly be justified, considering their appalling costs in pains, sufferings, and contempt for human morality and decency.

Concerning the claim that the goods should “outweigh the accompanying evils,” Dr. Paul Draper opined: “I don’t believe it is possible for Swinburne to show in any rigorous way that this criterion is satisfied in respect of all the world’s evils. One difficulty is that Swinburne’s theodicy is very complicated. Not only does it appeal to multiple goods, it appeals to multiple

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<sup>301</sup> Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil.”

<sup>302</sup> Paul Draper, “Review: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* by Richard Swinburne,” 463–64.

<sup>303</sup> Derk Pereboom, “A Defense Without Free Will,” 415.

goods for single evils, and multiple evils are explained in part by the same goods.”<sup>304</sup>

Furthermore, due to the lack of infallible foreknowledge, God has to take risks<sup>305</sup> in allowing evils and sufferings, hoping (with some probability thanks to his wisdom and intelligence) that the “good states which God seeks” (e.g., repentance and subsequent blessings) have a reasonable chance to “outweigh the accompanying evils” (e.g., trials and tribulations). However, “God’s estimate of the ‘effectiveness’ of some means of promoting repentance can only be based on how much that means raises the objective probability of repentance . . . what Swinburne needs, but does not have, is an explanation of why God might prefer to use suffering to raise this probability rather than some other means”<sup>306</sup> (e.g., health and wealth, miracles, spiritual blessings). In his “Theodicy of Heaven and Hell,” Swinburne stated: “I conclude that a good God might well allow a human to put himself beyond the possibility of salvation . . . The all-important punishment is to be deprived of eternal happiness . . . This deprivation, I have suggested, is plausibly an inevitable fate of those who have finally rejected the good.”<sup>307</sup> Thus, it is difficult to assert that the good will eventually outweigh the accompanying evil *for everyone*, or that God will *definitely* compensate humans with afterlife goods (“eternal happiness”) for the overall badness of their lives on earth.

Are Swinburne’s theodicy concerning heaven (i.e., a “Beatific Vision” of God)<sup>308</sup> and the assertion that “the free will defense already outlined could only work . . . if in fact there is also natural evil”<sup>309</sup> compatible with traditional Christian beliefs? Eleonore Stump commented:

“There is no natural evil in heaven and so, according to Swinburne’s position, no significant

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<sup>304</sup> Paul Draper, “Review: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* by Richard Swinburne,” 466.

<sup>305</sup> “God takes risks since he is not exercising detailed control.” John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 233.

<sup>306</sup> Paul Draper, “Review: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* by Richard Swinburne,” 461.

<sup>307</sup> Richard Swinburne, “A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell,” 51–52.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>309</sup> Richard Swinburne, “Natural Evils and Moral Choice,” 447.



exercise of free will either. Hence, on Swinburne's account, persons in heaven are not perfected in virtue of their translation to heaven, as Christian doctrine has traditionally claimed, but rather diminished in status. Thoughtful Christians troubled by the problem of evil, then, are not likely to be reassured by Swinburne's solution."<sup>310</sup> According to Swinburne, in heaven, human free will may be *influenced by God* (thus restricting free will?) who will remove tempting desires<sup>311</sup> and the inclination to reject the good.<sup>312</sup> If so, is not the wide range of actions of a "serious free will" constrained in heaven? Most orthodox understandings of heaven affirm instead that believers in the eternal state will enjoy (unconstrained) free will and moral impeccability.<sup>313</sup>

Finally, if given the choice, would any reasonable being choose to live in Swinburne's world? Dr. Richard Schoenig argued "against the FWT (Free Will Theodicy) by demonstrating that there are at least three logically possible worlds, one without FW (Free Will) and two with it,"<sup>314</sup> besides our world. A world without free will and no evil, a world with free will and with God's frequent interventions to prevent evils,<sup>315</sup> and a world with free will and no evil (i.e., a

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<sup>310</sup> Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil," 398.

<sup>311</sup> "God could easily in an afterlife remove such desires without changing the formed characters of men of good will, and he would be expected to allow men's choice to reject such desires finally to have the effect that the desires no longer impinge on men's consciousness." Richard Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell," footnote 19, 54.

<sup>312</sup> "The heavenly world . . . lacks . . . the good of being able to reject the good. In this last respect, Swinburne sounded similar to Ockham, Scotus and Suarez. In each case there was some kind of reduction of freedom." Simon Gaine, *Will There Be Free Will in Heaven?* 108.

<sup>313</sup> "In what follows, we will refer to the conjunction of the following two theses (i) the redeemed in heaven have free will, and (ii) the redeemed in heaven are no longer capable of sinning as the 'traditional view of heaven,' or simply 'the traditional view.' The traditional view seems to be in internal tension. For instance, one may wonder: how can someone be free and yet incapable of sinning? If the redeemed are kept from sinning, their wills must be reined in, at least in some way. And, if their wills are reined in, it doesn't seem right to say that they are free. We will refer to this as the Problem of Heavenly Freedom." Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, "Incompatibility, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven." 399. We will address the issue of free will and no evil in heaven later in the discussion.

<sup>314</sup> Richard Schoenig, "The Free Will Theodicy," 457–70.

<sup>315</sup> "Could not all bad choices be prevented, so they had no effect? Swinburne refuted this by introducing The Principle of Honesty, which he claims is a moral truth. The principle implies that God must be honest, and so could not create a world where its inhabitants are systematically deceived. If we had thought that we had a serious choice, but did not, we would have been deceived, and God cannot deceive us." Atle S¸ovik, *The Problem of Evil and the Power of God*, 28.

world where humans always freely do what is right)<sup>316</sup> are *all* preferable to our actual world.

Schoenig concluded that “the FWT does not solve the problem of the SOI (suffering of the innocent) in a world such as ours, created and sustained by an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God.”<sup>317</sup> Why would the Omnigod choose to create Swinburne’s world rather than the other three possible (and better) worlds?

In summary, Swinburne’s theodicy, due its complexity, controversial claims, and various shortcomings has not been widely accepted.<sup>318</sup>

#### 2.5.4 Other Theodicies.

Theodicies have also been proposed by John Feinberg,<sup>319</sup> David Ray Griffin,<sup>320</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams,<sup>321</sup> Eleonore Stump,<sup>322</sup> and Thomas Jay Oord<sup>323</sup> (among many others). Questions and various issues have been raised against Feinberg’s “theological determinism,”<sup>324</sup> Griffin’s

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<sup>316</sup> Plantinga claimed that such a world (world where humans with free will always do what is right and never commit evil) cannot be created by God. Others (e.g., J. L. Mackie) have argued that such a world can be created by God (e.g., heaven).

<sup>317</sup> Richard Schoenig, “The Free Will Theodicy,” 470.

<sup>318</sup> “Swinburne is explicit that this demonstration (a theodicy) must be made only to the subject’s own satisfaction.” However, “Peter van Inwagen, for example, has insisted that a successful philosophical argument, in any domain, would have to convert a court of idealized neutral inquirers under appropriate dialectical circumstances to its conclusion.” Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 113. See Paul Draper, “Review: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* by Richard Swinburne,” 456–74. Also see Philip Quinn, “Review of Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*,” 394–98.

<sup>319</sup> John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*.

<sup>320</sup> David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*.

<sup>321</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. Similarly, Dr. Ekstrom’s “Divine Intimacy Theodicy” “core idea is that, sometimes when persons suffer, they experience connection with God.” Laura Ekstrom, “A Christian Theodicy,” 267.

<sup>322</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*.

<sup>323</sup> Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God*.

<sup>324</sup> Bruce Reichenbach, “Evil and a Reformed View of God,” 67–85. Clark Pinnock, “Clark Pinnock’s Response [to John Feinberg],” 57–60.

“process theodicy,”<sup>325</sup> Adam’s “aesthetic approach,”<sup>326</sup> Stump’s “union with God,”<sup>327</sup> and Oord’s “essential kenosis.”<sup>328</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusion.

Thus, none of the numerous defenses and theodicies in this literature review of the logical and evidential problems of evil has met with unmitigated acceptance by theists and non-theists. In his argument for an “anti-theodicy” approach, Dr. Nick Trakakis wrote: “The problem of evil often strikes people as *irresolvable*. No adequate or convincing solution to the problem seems forthcoming, and this despite numerous and often sophisticated attempts over the centuries and from highly trained and gifted philosophers and theologians (emphasis in original).”<sup>329</sup>

Dr. Plantinga’s “Free Will Defense,” while adequate to counter the logical argument from evil, is insufficient as a response to the evidential problem of evil. Dr. Wykstra’s “Skeptical Theism Defense” supplies no reason to explain *why* God would allow evils in the world (except for “reasons beyond our ken”).<sup>330</sup> Dr. Hasker’s “Open Theism Theodicy” fails to convince other scholars that God is not omniscient in the classical and orthodox sense or that God and “gratuitous evils” are compatible (contra Rowe’s Theological Premise). Thus, Rowe’s

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<sup>325</sup> Bruce Reichenbach, “Evil, Omnipotence, and Process Thought,” 301–26. Kenneth Pak, *Divine Power and Evil: A Reply to Process Theodicy*. David Basinger, *Divine Power in Process Theism*.

<sup>326</sup> William Placher, “An Engagement with Marilyn Mc Cord Adams’s *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*,” 461–67. Andrew Chignell, “The Problem of Infant Suffering,” 205–17. Andrew Gleeson, “On Letting Go of Theodicy: Marilyn McCord Adams on God and Evil,” 1–12.

<sup>327</sup> Paul Draper, “Review of *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*.” Andrew Chignell, “The Problem of Infant Suffering,” 205–17. David Eford and David Worsley, “Critical Review of Eleonore Stump’s *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*,” 547–58.

<sup>328</sup> Phillip Cary, William Lane Craig, William Hasker and Stephen Wysktra responded to Thomas Jay Oord’s view of “Essential Kenosis” in *God and the Problem of Evil*, 131–62, 173–84. Also see Ron Highfield, “A Review of Thomas J. Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence*.”

<sup>329</sup> Nick Trakakis, “Anti-theodicy,” 94.

<sup>330</sup> Bruce Russell, “Defenseless,” 197.

“Evidential Argument from Evil” has yet to be successfully refuted (at least not to everyone’s satisfaction).<sup>331</sup>

Dr. Daniel Speak concluded: “Where does this leave us? Not, I hope, with simple cynicism about the project of theodicy or about the prospects for its future development.”<sup>332</sup> With that in mind, we will now proceed to the “Tough-Love Proposal,”<sup>333</sup> a novel attempt to bring some measure of clarity to the excruciating problem of evil. We will endeavor to fill the gap left by the previous defenses and theodicies. This theory will suggest a morally sufficient reason (i.e., “tough love”) for *why* God would allow evils, whether gratuitous or non-gratuitous, excessive, horrendous, or “soul destroying.” The section for non-theists will *not* use any facts or evidence that may not be widely accepted by that persuasion (e.g., the existence of Adam and Eve, Satan and demons, the Holy Spirit, heaven and hell, the Bible . . . ).<sup>334</sup> The section for Christian theists will use supporting evidence from the Christian Scriptures.

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<sup>331</sup> “Although it might therefore be premature to declare any one side to the debate victorious, it can be concluded that, at the very least, Rowe’s evidential argument is not as easy to refute as is often presumed.” Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil,”

<sup>332</sup> Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 114. Dr. Trakakis averred: “On the anti-theodicy view, by contrast, no remedy is possible, other than the fundamental one of abandoning the entire enterprise of theodicy-construction.” Nick Trakakis, “Anti-theodicy,” 97.

<sup>333</sup> To our knowledge, this theodicy has not been proposed by anyone before.

<sup>334</sup> “One important restriction proposed by Rowe is based on the distinction between Restricted Standard Theism (RST: standard theism unaccompanied by other, independent religious claims) and Expanded Standard Theism (EST: standard theism conjoined with certain other religious claims).” Peterson, “Christian Theism and the Evidential Argument from Evil,” 173. “ST (Standard Theism) is taken to accurately, albeit not exhaustively, reflect the variety of monotheism that is widely shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Specifically, ST holds that there exists just one God, that this God is a person or person-like, and that whatever else God is like, God must be a proper object of worship.” Nick Trakakis, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Eight Views in Dialogue*, 1.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE TOUGH-LOVE PROPOSAL FOR NON-THEISTS

#### 3.1 Introduction.

We will start by defining some terms needed for this chapter (e.g., “tough love”). We will then proceed with a formulation of the “Tough-love Proposal,” three premises followed by a conclusion, a “hypothetical syllogism”<sup>1</sup> in logic. While the argument is clearly valid, its soundness depends on the three premises. As mentioned in the methodology section (page 8), support for the premises will be drawn from findings in other fields of knowledge: history, cultures (Eastern, Western), child rearing, social work, politics . . .

In deference to Dr. Rowe’s requirement for Restricted Standard Theism,<sup>2</sup> no religious material (e.g., the Bible) will be used to support the proposal. The adoption of such evidence to buttress the argument will not be accepted by Rowe and other non-theists and may cause the rejection of the thesis. We will therefore limit ourselves to secular facts and findings that are satisfactory to all parties. Real life case studies (e.g., Dr. Ludwig Boltzmann, the “Son of Sam” serial killer) will be used to illustrate and support some of the concepts.

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<sup>1</sup> “A hypothetical syllogism is a valid argument form in logic. The form of hypothetical syllogism is: ‘If P, then Q. If Q, then R. Therefore, if P, then R.’” <http://www.philosophy-index.com/logic/forms/hypothetical-syllogism.php>

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Michael Peterson stated: “After many years of debate, we should learn the lesson that it is extremely difficult, and perhaps not all that enlightening, to conduct the debate within the confines of RST (Restricted Standard Theism: standard theism unaccompanied by other, independent religious claims). However, Rowe cautions that invoking some versions of EST (Extended Standard Theism: standard theism conjoined with certain other religious claims), say, drawn from Christian theology is actually counterproductive as a response to his argument.” Michael Peterson, “Christian Theism and the Evidential Argument from Evil,” 173.

In this chapter, we hope to show that a morally justifying reason (i.e., “tough love”) can be given to explain the existence of “gratuitous” evils. We will argue that the Omnigod can exist in the presence of evils (gratuitous or otherwise) as he does not *necessarily* prevent all evils (contra Rowe’s Theological Premise). Evil and sufferings in this world are solely due to human actions or inactions as they deny God’s existence and insist on living as they please. Thus, we will meet our first three research objectives, (1) To defend the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God in the presence of “gratuitous” evil, (2) To suggest a probable reason (a morally justifying reason) for the existence of horrendous and “gratuitous” evils in the world, and (3) To show that humans are responsible for the evils (“gratuitous” or otherwise) in this realm.

### **3.2 Definitions of Terms.**

God is construed as a being who is “all-powerful, all-knowing and perfectly good,”<sup>3</sup> in other words, an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator of the world (William Rowe’s definition of God).<sup>4</sup>

Evil is understood as “a privation of the good, a deviation from moral law, a hindrance from possessing anything that is good, a wrong choice, and an action that fails to meet a standard

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil.”

<sup>4</sup> We are not adopting the approach of “reconceptualizing” the orthodox God. See Andrei Buckareff and Yugin Nagasawa (eds.). *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*. Also see John Bishop, “Can There Be Alternative Concepts of God?” 174–88. See Mark Johnston. *Saving God: Religion after Idolatry*. Rather, in this section for non-theists, we will use William Rowe’s “Restricted Standard Theism” definition of God. “Restricted theism is the view that  $\theta$  (an omnipotent, omniscient, omnigood being who created the world) exists, unaccompanied by other, independent religious claims.” William Rowe, “Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra,” 95.

of goodness. Evil is the occurrence of anything less than good and involves serious harm that causes fatal or lasting physical and non-physical injury” (from page 17).

Tough-love is defined as the “promotion of a person’s welfare, especially that of an addict, child, or criminal, by enforcing certain constraints on them, or requiring them to take responsibility for their actions.”<sup>5</sup> Tough-love is to have to say to one’s child: “I don’t care how this makes you feel toward me. You may hate my guts, but I love you, and I’m doing this because I love you.”<sup>6</sup>

### 3.3 The “Tough-love” Proposal.

The proposal<sup>7</sup> consists of three premises leading to a conclusion:

(1) God, if he exists, disapproves<sup>8</sup> of humans claiming that God does not exist.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tough\\_love](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tough_love)

<sup>6</sup> Bill Milliken, *The Last Dropout: Stop the Epidemic!* 62.

<sup>7</sup> Since this is a section for non-theists, religious materials are not used. However, for those who may be interested, the premises of the “Tough-love Proposal” are supported by Christian Scriptures. Premise 1 (God, if he exists, disapproves of humans claiming that God does not exist) can be seen in the Psalms. “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1). “The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him. All his thoughts are, ‘There is no God.’” (Psalm 10:4). Premise 2 (In his disapproval, God lets humans go their own way, resulting in good and evil from their free will and, in love, patiently waits for them to return, an approach popularly known as “tough-love”) can be observed in Romans 1:28–31, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful.” However, “the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The “Tough-love” approach can be clearly recognized in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–31). Premise 3 (In his disapproval, God may not intervene in humans’ environment to prevent natural evils) can be seen in Romans 8:20–22 (NIV), “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” Furthermore, “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19 NIV).

<sup>8</sup> “To think (something) wrong or reprehensible; censure or condemn in opinion; to withhold approval from; decline to sanction.” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/disapprove>. If the Omnicod exists, humans’ claim that he is non-existent is wrong, reprehensible, and deserves strong condemnation and censure.

(2) In his disapproval, God lets humans go their own way (resulting in good and evil from their free will)<sup>9</sup> and, in love, patiently waits for them to return, an approach popularly known as

“tough-love.”<sup>10</sup>

(3) In his disapproval, God may not intervene in humans’ environment to prevent natural evils.<sup>11</sup>

(4) God and evil (moral and natural)<sup>12</sup> can exist together.

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<sup>9</sup> The “Tough-love Proposal” advocates a libertarian free will. See Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*. The “Tough-love Proposal” does not claim that free will *necessarily* leads to some “ultimate good,” outweighing all the evils in the world over the millenniums. Rather, the freedom to do good or evil (and to love God freely) is a *logical requirement* of a libertarian free will. Dr. Swinburne wrote: “The most obvious example of this logical straitjacket to which even God is subject is that he cannot give us very serious free will, i.e. the free will to choose between good and wrong, without the natural possibility (unprevented by God) that we will do wrong.” Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 127. Dr. Adams affirmed: “Not even an omnipotent God can introduce incompatibilist free creatures into the world without accepting the possibility, which he is powerless to exclude, that they will sin.” Marilyn McCord Adams, “Redemptive Suffering as a Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil,” 216. Dr. Bishop opined concerning theists and their burden of proof: “They must provide theodicies that exemplify what, for all we know, God’s morally adequate reasons for causing or permitting evil could possibly be, on the assumption that even omnipotent power is subject to constraints, *though only of a logical kind* (emphases mine).” John Bishop, “Response to Trakakis,” 110. C. S. Lewis said: “God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right . . . Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 52. However, human free will is limited. “Our freedom is both too much and too little. It is far more an occasion for waste than a defense of God’s total goodness can reconcile.” John K. Roth, “A Theodicy of Protest,” 12. In his wisdom, God may want his followers to voluntarily give up their free will and only do his will. “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

<sup>10</sup> The “tough-love” approach is used *in addition to* God’s other persistent efforts to bring people back to himself (e.g., through the tireless work of God’s Holy Spirit, the Church, the parachurch organizations . . .). Thus, the “Tough-love Proposal” is *not* deism. Deism is defined as “the belief in a single god who does not act to influence events, and whose existence has no connection with religions, religious buildings, or religious books, etc.” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/deism>. In the “Tough-love Proposal,” the transcendent and immanent God is *actively* involved in the world he created. He patiently calls non-believers to return to him and acknowledge his existence and love. For believers, he continually works to fulfill his promise that “all things work together for good *to those who love God*” (Romans 8:28). C. S. Lewis argued that pain and suffering are God’s means to bring people back to him. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*. Peter van Inwagen advocated a similar understanding. Peter van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy,” 370–93.

<sup>11</sup> While God, in his loving providence, *may* sustain humans’ environment, he cannot be expected to miraculously prevent natural evils and protect people who do not believe in his existence. The problem of the existence of natural evils prior to humans’ appearance on earth is addressed later in the discussion.

<sup>12</sup> Evil can be gratuitous or non-gratuitous, of various kinds, excessive in amount or duration, or particularly horrendous due to humans’ actions and the vagaries of their environment. The “Tough-love Proposal” can accommodate the presence of all evils, gratuitous or otherwise. It obviates the need to resolve the exceedingly difficult problem of determining whether any evil is justified. “The nature of the problem makes it impossible for any theist to show that all actual evil is justified. But it is also true that the nature of these problems makes it impossible for non-theists to show that actual evil is not justified.” M. B. Ahern, *The Problem of Evil*, 72.



The argument is deductive and valid. It is sound if the premises are true. A more formal rendition (a hypothetical syllogism) is as follows:

- 1'. If God exists, God disapproves of humans claiming that he does not exist.
- 2'. If God disapproves of humans claiming that he does not exist, God does not *necessarily* intervene to prevent all evils (a tough-love approach).
- 3'. If God does not *necessarily* intervene to prevent all evils, there are evils (moral, natural, gratuitous . . .).
- 4'. Therefore, if God exists, there are evils (moral, natural, gratuitous . . .).

The proposal suggests a morally sufficient reason (i.e., “tough-love”) for God to allow evil.

As a result of “tough-love,” people are free to act as they see fit, doing good (e.g., Mother Teresa’s virtuous deeds in India) as well as evil (e.g., Hitler’s horrendous crimes perpetrated in the Holocaust). Moral goods and evils are thus the consequences of human actions without outside interference (e.g., from God if he exists).<sup>13</sup> Natural goods (e.g., rains for the crops) and natural evils (e.g., rains causing floods) are the results of natural laws and/or human actions (e.g., deforestations). Since people are in full control of their lives and (most of) their environment, they must bear total responsibility for their deeds whether good or evil. If they do well and solve all the problems in the world, they can congratulate themselves for a job well done. However, if they falter in their task, they have two options to consider.

They can decide to seek help from God. This will require the acknowledgment that God exists for how can one ask for succor from a non-existent being? If they *freely* choose to take this path, the “tough-love” approach will be successful in bringing them back to God. Contrary to the

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God (if he exists) may choose to intervene if he so desires.

claims of deism, God is *actively* involved in humankind's redemptive process through the tireless, *persuasive* work<sup>14</sup> of believers, churches, parachurch organizations . . .

On the other hand, humans can also choose to “tough it out” and continue to “go it alone.” The reasoning may be that God does not exist<sup>15</sup> and that seeking help from that quarter is totally illogical, a “delusion,”<sup>16</sup> and a fool's errand. They may also think that inviting God to the table will require giving up too much control for too little gain as no one likes to be told what to do and few people delight in giving someone else veto power over their lives. Furthermore, non-theists may not be impressed by theists who often act contrary to their stated beliefs and go through lives in the exact same manner as their non-theist brethren. The reasons given by non-theists for maintaining their cherished independence are numerous.<sup>17</sup> One cannot say that non-theists are unreasonable or illogical in their decisions. After all, God (if he exists) does give everyone a free will<sup>18</sup> to acknowledge him or not.

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<sup>14</sup> With God's help, believers are exhorted to love their neighbors as themselves, do everything in their power to relieve pains and sufferings, counter evils in the world, and bring people to the knowledge of God. Since the “Tough-love Proposal” does *not* claim that evils lead to some ultimate good, “our ordinary moral *obligation* to intervene in such cases” is preserved. Stephen Maitzen, “The Moral Skepticism Objection to Skeptical Theism,” 450.

<sup>15</sup> “Voltaire was simply ludicrous when he said that if god did not exist it would be necessary to invent him. The human invention of god is the problem to begin with.” Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, 96.

<sup>16</sup> “My title, *The God Delusion*, does not refer to the God of Einstein . . . I am talking only about *supernatural* gods . . . Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament.” Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Why I am Not a Christian: and Other Essays in Religion and Related Subjects*. Also see Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. See Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*.

<sup>18</sup> Free will can be compatible or incompatible with determinism. Determinism means that all events are determined by previous causes. Dr. Couenhoven said: “Divine determinism is the idea that God has intentionally made it the case that there is only one possible future.” Jesse Couenhoven, *Predestination: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 12. If free will is understood in the compatibilist sense, humans follow their desires and do what they want to do. “If the act is according to the agent's desires, then even though the act is causally determined, it is free and the agent is morally responsible.” John Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things,” 37. If free will is understood in the libertarian sense, humans can choose between options as the outcome is not determined by previous causes or by God. For example, in Open Theism, the outcome “is not a controlled situation where nothing unexpected happens and everything turns out just as God wants.” Clark Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” 152. The subject of free will is very complex and under debate. See Robert Kane, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*. Also see Michael McKenna and Derk Pereboom, *Free Will: A Contemporary Introduction*. See Kevin Timpe, Meghan Griffith, and Neil Levy, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Free Will*.

Thus, if the premises of the “Tough-love Proposal” are true, the conclusion that the Omnigod can exist in the presence of evils (moral, natural, gratuitous . . .) will counter Rowe’s argument that the Omnigod *prevents* all gratuitous evils. We will now endeavor to show that the premises have strong support from various fields of knowledge.

### **3.4 Support for the First Premise.**

(1) God, if he exists, disapproves of humans claiming that God does not exist.

No one likes to be treated as a non-entity; everyone likes to be recognized and acknowledged. Dale Carnegie once said: “Remember that a person’s name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.”<sup>19</sup> “The average person is more interested in his or her own name than in all the other names on earth put together. Remember that name and call it easily, and you have paid a subtle and very effective compliment.”<sup>20</sup> Likewise, God, as a person,<sup>21</sup> would want to be acknowledged and addressed as a real being rather than just as a figment of one’s imagination. “Being ignored is a hurtful experience that can make you feel anxious, angry or sad. But no one deserves this treatment.”<sup>22</sup> If that is so, one can hardly be surprised that God would disapprove of humans insisting that God is a Santa Claus-like myth, the Easter Bunny, or a pure “delusion,”<sup>23</sup> an utterly disrespectful treatment of the creator of the universe, as he claims to be.

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<sup>19</sup> Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, 117.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>21</sup> “Hence, since everything that is perfect must be attributed to God, forasmuch as His essence contains every perfection, this name ‘person’ is fittingly applied to God; not, however, as it is applied to creatures, but in a more excellent way.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.29.3

<sup>22</sup> Melody Causewell, “What Does It Mean to Ignore Someone?” <https://oureverydaylife.com/mean-ignore-someone-5384614.html>

<sup>23</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

Nevertheless, is it right for God to use a blanket “tough-love” treatment for the whole world? According to the Pew Research Center, Christians and Jews account for only 31.4 percent of the world population in 2015,<sup>24</sup> thus leaving 68.6 percent of the world not believing in the Judeo-Christian God. The same can be said for the Muslim God with 24.1 percent adherents (75.9 percent non-adherents).<sup>25</sup> Thus, a large majority of the world population does not believe in the God of the Bible (an even larger majority disbelieves the God of the Quran). God’s disapproval is therefore justified as only a small minority<sup>26</sup> of mankind acknowledged his existence as an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God.

Ludwig was a professor of Physics in Austria. “He demonstrated that the second law (of thermodynamics) could be interpreted by blending the laws of mechanics, applied to the motions of the atoms, with the theory of probability. He clarified that the second law is an essentially statistical law.”<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, most scientists at the time disbelieved the existence of atoms, preferring the electromagnetic view of nature. Ludwig tried to suggest a compromise solution, to no avail. In 1904, at a major physics conference in St. Louis, Ludwig was shunned and ignored by his colleagues. His “lecture was *involuntarily* titled ‘The Relations of Applied Mathematics.’ Nor was it even allowed to be given in the physics section of the conference (emphasis mine).”<sup>28</sup> As a result, Ludwig “was greatly demoralized due to the harsh criticism of his work.”<sup>29</sup> He felt “that his life’s work was about to collapse despite his defense of his theories.”<sup>30</sup> On September 5,

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Not all of the 31.2 percent of “Christians” in the world believe that the Christian God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. For example, only 80 percent of American “Christians” believe in the God described in the Bible. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/25/key-findings-about-americans-belief-in-god/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.famousscientists.org/ludwig-boltzmann/>

<sup>28</sup> John Blackmore, *Ludwig Boltzmann*, 115.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.famousscientists.org/ludwig-boltzmann/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/history/Biographies/Boltzmann.html>

1906, while on vacation with his wife and daughter in Duino, Austria, he committed suicide by hanging himself. Ludwig Boltzmann was only 62 years old. His contributions to science include the “Maxwell-Boltzmann distribution” for molecular speeds in idealized gases, the “Boltzmann equation,” and the “Boltzmann constant.” A brilliant career was unfortunately cut short by a lack of acknowledgment and recognition of one’s worth and existence!

Likewise, we should not be surprised that the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God wants to be acknowledged by his creatures for who he is, the creator of the universe. Nor should we wonder about his strong disapproval of the innumerable solemn and persistent assertions of his non-existence!<sup>31</sup>

### **3.5 Support for the Second Premise.**

(2) In his disapproval, God lets humans go their own way (resulting in good and evil from their free will) and in love, patiently waits for them to return, an approach popularly known as “tough-love.”

Since people have free will and can decide to respond to God’s invitation or not, God, in true love, refrains from forcing himself on them and, with great patience and forbearance, waits for them to change their minds and hopefully acknowledge their creator’s existence. This is not to say that God is doing nothing in the meantime (i.e., deism). He is *actively* working to foster a

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<sup>31</sup> “The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men.” Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, 23. “A poll of scientists who are members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in May and June 2009, found that 51% of scientists believe in God or a higher power.” <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/11/05/an-overview-of-religion-and-science-in-the-united-states/> Thus, 49% of the scientists polled do not believe in God or a higher power.

relationship with his creatures through the efforts of his followers.<sup>32</sup> In “tough-love,” God allows people to exercise their free will on earth and live with the consequences, whether good or evil.

With this “tough-love” approach, should people be surprised that God *appears* to be a “benign, absentee landlord of the universe,”<sup>33</sup> that there is good evidence that God “is dead,”<sup>34</sup> or that he “does not exist”?<sup>35</sup> Is it astounding that some may conclude that “the most reasonable inference is to a creator that is completely indifferent to his sentient creatures”?<sup>36</sup> After all, “tough-love” aims to create a separation, Hick’s “epistemic distance”<sup>37</sup> between humans and God so that they can *freely* make up their minds about God’s existence without any coercion or undue pressure. Should they then wonder why God does not (miraculously) intervene and prevent horrendous (moral and natural) evils when “distancing”<sup>38</sup> is the chosen policy?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> God patiently acts through the Holy Spirit, the Church, the parachurch organizations . . . to convince people of his existence. However, he does so in a non-coercive manner. People are totally free to reject *all* evangelistic efforts.

<sup>33</sup> Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 190.

<sup>34</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 181.

<sup>35</sup> Victor Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis*. Non-theists may not experience God’s presence and comfort and may thus conclude that he does not exist. Rowe’s questions concerning the absence of God’s “love, concern, and care” are explained by humans’ decision to separate themselves from God and deny his existence. William Rowe, “Evil, Evidence, and Skeptical Theism--A Debate,” 137.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Peterson, “Introduction,” 3. “Draper argues that that the ‘hypothesis of indifference’ explains the facts of pain and pleasure, including their perplexing distribution and the evolutionary functions they serve, better than theism does.” (Ibid., 12). The “hypothesis of indifference” claims that a supreme being, if he exists, is indifferent to human suffering. Paul Draper, “Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists,” 331–50. The same concept was addressed by Plato. “But the man who holds that gods exist, but pay no regard to human affairs,—him we must admonish.” Plato, *Laws*, 10.899d. In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God is *not* indifferent to his creatures’ pains and sufferings. He endeavors to bring them back to himself through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the parachurch organizations, yet without coercion.

<sup>37</sup> John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 44. William Rowe commented on Hick’s “epistemic distance”: “If all Hicks means to say is that, in order to come *freely* to know God (or to believe in God), one must exist at an epistemic distance from God, then I grant him his point. If God is directly present to me in all his power, glory, and love, my intellect compels my assent to the proposition that he exists; there is no room for free assent. The problem is that Hick does not stop with this point. He sometimes says that, in order to be *a person*, in order to be *morally free*, in order to be free with respect to *loving God*, we must exist at an epistemic distance from God (emphases in original).” William Rowe, “Paradox and Promise: Hick’s Solution to the Problem of Evil,” 115. “Epistemic distance” is used here in the sense granted by Rowe, i.e., “room for free assent” and a lack of coercion.

<sup>38</sup> “Distancing” is more humans’ attitude than God’s. Humans choose to separate themselves from their creator who reluctantly accepts the situation. God’s “tough-love” approach (like a human parent’s) is a last-ditch effort to bring them back to himself.

<sup>39</sup> God may not intervene in the lives of people in order to give them “room for free assent.” God “neither causes nor prevents tragedies.” Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 188.

Should God “limit the freedom of would-be villains to protect would-be victims”<sup>40</sup> when “tough-love” is the desired mean (and probably the only avenue left)<sup>41</sup> to bring recalcitrant humans back to God? Should they question God’s love and goodness in the genocides perpetrated by Hitler and Pol Pot<sup>42</sup> when they insist on their freedom to do whatever they want? Do these horrendous evils cause them to reconsider their position? Are they turning back to God? Considering the meager results of conversions,<sup>43</sup> should the number and severity of evils (gratuitous or otherwise) in the world be increased?<sup>44</sup>

Should God persevere in the “tough-love” path<sup>45</sup> to bring his creatures back into a relationship with him (assuming that a relationship with the creator God is the “ultimate good”)?<sup>46</sup> Should “tough-love” parents hold fast in hope or should they “write off” their offspring and disown them?<sup>47</sup> How long should they (and God) continue *in love* to offer an avenue for forgiveness and reconciliation in the face of persistent rejection?

Is “tough-love” a reasonable approach for God to adopt? Thankfully, it has been used (somewhat) successfully in the field of parenting,<sup>48</sup> drug abuse recovery,<sup>49</sup> care for the

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<sup>40</sup> James Sterba, “There Is no Free-Will Defense,” 302.

<sup>41</sup> God already employs the other means and is continuing his other endeavors (e.g., work of God’s Holy Spirit, efforts of the Church, evangelistic campaigns of parachurch organizations . . .).

<sup>42</sup> “Pol Pot was a political leader whose communist Khmer Rouge government led Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. During that time, an estimated 1.5 to 2 million Cambodians died of starvation, execution, disease, or overwork.” <https://www.history.com/topics/pol-pot>

<sup>43</sup> “Ninety-five percent of all Christians have never won a soul to Christ . . . Our results in evangelism have been mediocre, at best.” <https://bible.org/illustration/evangelism-statistics>

<sup>44</sup> In the “Tough-love Proposal,” the problems of the “excessive” number, “unnecessary” severity, and “gratuitousness” of evils in this world are the results of humans declaring their independence from God, going their own way, and doing whatever they please. After two world wars (24–100 million casualties), two nuclear bomb explosions, numerous genocides, the September 11 terrorist attack, and many dire environmental warnings, humans are still no closer to God.

<sup>45</sup> Jon Gordon said: “I believe in tough love . . . But for tough love to work, love must come first.” Jon Gordon, “Love Tough.” <http://www.jongordon.com/positive-tip-love-tough.html>

<sup>46</sup> Dr. Eleonore Stump advocates that “the ultimate good for persons is union with God.” Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 411.

<sup>47</sup> Or should they give in, bail out their kids, and enable them to go down the path of self-destruction?

<sup>48</sup> Tracey Jensen, “Warmth and Wealth: Re-imagining Social Class in Taxonomies of Good Parenting.”

<sup>49</sup> Pauline Neff, *Tough-love: How Parents Can Deal with Drug Abuse*.

homeless,<sup>50</sup> and even in the global political arena.<sup>51</sup> “Tough love takes courage. Some of the children clear out. This is hard on parents, but they accept the risk because the alternative of continuing to support irresponsible behavior is worse.”<sup>52</sup> Dr. William Hasker observed: “And if the children insist on making *really big* mistakes (the biblical story of the Prodigal Son may serve as an example), the parents may have no choice but to stand back, despite their own pain and foreboding, and let the child experience the consequences of the course he has chosen (emphases in original).”<sup>53</sup> Does God have any other (loving and non-coercing) alternative if humans insist on their rights to go their own way and refuse to acknowledge God’s existence? “Tough-love” may be “the best hope”<sup>54</sup> for them to return to God.

We may also wonder: “Has God tried other, less onerous alternatives before applying this ‘tough-love’ approach?”<sup>55</sup> Since no one is born with the knowledge of God, how does one become cognizant of his existence? If one is fortunate enough to be born in a family of theists, one would be exposed to the concept of deity at an early age. Although that may be an advantage, it can also become a double-edged sword as many children for various reasons turn against the beliefs of their parents as they grow to maturity. Besides parental instructions and (hopefully) good examples from teachers and mentors, Bibles are ubiquitously and freely provided worldwide in (almost) all languages to alert people to God’s presence. Religious books are widely available everywhere at low (or no) cost to anyone willing to read and ponder God’s

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<sup>50</sup> Jon Limebury and Sue Shea, “The Role of Compassion and ‘Tough-love’ in Caring for and Supporting the Homeless.”

<sup>51</sup> Garrett Hardin, “The Toughlove Solution,” 45.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> William Hasker, “God and Gratuitous evil,” 475.

<sup>54</sup> “No amount of moral or natural evil, of course, can guarantee that a man will seek God's help. If it could, the willing it produced would not be free. But evil of this sort is the best hope, I think, and maybe the only effective means, for bringing men to such a state.” Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 409.

<sup>55</sup> We do not claim that “tough-love” is God’s *actual* reason for allowing evils in the world for we, as creatures, only “know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:9). “Tough love” is a possible reason (and very probable reason, in our opinion) why God can exist with evil.



existence. Internet postings, billboards, churches, evangelistic rallies, radio and television broadcasts spread the message far and wide. Furthermore, friends, co-workers, relatives, acquaintances, and even strangers are more than willing to share their knowledge of God to anyone who would show the least bit of interest (or even no interest at all)! If God exists, he is investing enormous amounts of money (e.g., “American churches receive record 114.9 B donations in 2014”),<sup>56</sup> time, and talent of his followers to let the whole world know about his existence. Is that massive endeavor successful? In 2019, according to the Pew Research Center, “the religiously unaffiliated share of the (US) population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or ‘nothing in particular,’ now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009,”<sup>57</sup> despite the prodigious evangelistic efforts and the immense financial expenditures. In view of the above, it should not be surprising that God would adopt a “tough-love” approach *in addition to* his other means (e.g., churches, TV and radio programs, evangelistic rallies . . .)<sup>58</sup> to bring humans back to himself.

Is “tough-love” going to be ultimately successful?<sup>59</sup> Parents using “tough-love” with drug-abuse children always hope that their offspring will soon hit “rock bottom” and “see the light.” However, as we all know, the results of “tough-love” are not uniformly positive. People with free will may still decide to persist and die in their destructive paths rather than “come to their senses,” no matter how much (or how little) help they receive to overcome their problems. For example, according to Dr. Dodes, a psychiatry professor at Harvard Medical School, a 12-

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<sup>56</sup><https://www.christiantoday.com/article/american.churches.receive.record.114.9.b.donations.in.2014.report/57240.htm>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

<sup>58</sup> Since this section is for non-theists who, by definition, do not believe in God’s existence, the direct work of God’s Holy Spirit in evangelism and conversion is not mentioned.

<sup>59</sup> “Crosses and afflictions are such great graces that the wicked are rarely converted without them, and good people are only made perfect by the same means.” Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, V.16.7

step recovery program like AA (Alcoholic Anonymous) has a success rate of only between “5 and 10 percent.”<sup>60</sup> “Of the 23.5 million teenagers and adults addicted to alcohol or drugs, only about 1 in 10 gets treatment, which too often fails to keep them drug-free.”<sup>61</sup> A recent medical study “set out to estimate the overall mortality rate in a longitudinal cohort of people with substance use disorders seeking treatment . . . The overall mortality rate in this sample was 11 per 1000 person-years . . . more than twice the expected rate (4.4 per 1000 person-years) for a community sample in Cook County, Illinois.”<sup>62</sup> A “tough-love” approach is often a last-ditch effort to salvage a “hopeless” situation. Likewise, God’s “tough-love” approach (combined with his other evangelistic efforts) offers only a modest hope of bringing humans back to the knowledge of God.

Richard was born out of wedlock to a poor Jewish woman who was involved with a married man. The infant, named Richard David Falco (after the woman’s estranged husband) was given up for adoption to a Jewish couple of moderate means. Richard was a troubled child growing up, variously described as a loner with a mean streak, a bully involved in “petty larceny and pyromania. His psychological state deteriorated further when his adoptive mother died of breast cancer”<sup>63</sup> when he was fourteen. He did not get along with his adoptive father’s second wife and joined the army when he turned eighteen. After his discharge, he worked for the US Postal Service.

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<sup>60</sup> Lance Dodes and Zachary Dodes, *The Sober Truth: Debunking the Bad Science Behind Twelve Steps Program and the Rehab Industry*, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Jane Brody, “Effective Addiction Treatment,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Christy Scott et al. “Surviving Drug Addiction: The Effect of Treatment and Abstinence on Mortality,” 741–42.

<sup>63</sup> [http://www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/234/i\\_am\\_the\\_son\\_of\\_sam.html](http://www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/234/i_am_the_son_of_sam.html)

He started out his criminal career by setting “1488 fires in New York City by his own account and (pulling) several hundred false alarms.”<sup>64</sup> “Each fire was carefully noted in a journal, in which he referred to himself as ‘The Phantom of the Bronx.’”<sup>65</sup> His killing spree began on July 29, 1976 with the shooting of two teenage girls using a .44 caliber Bulldog revolver. By the time of his arrest on August 10, 1977, he had killed six people and wounded seven. He claimed that the killings were ordered by a demon-possessed dog named Harvey owned by his neighbor Sam. Nevertheless, he was deemed mentally competent and sentenced to six consecutive 25-years-to-life terms. “Since his arrest, Berkowitz has retracted his possessed dog, ‘Son of Sam’ story—claiming ‘It was all a hoax, a silly hoax.’”<sup>66</sup> The real reason for the murders might have been his anger against women and the world that has rejected him.<sup>67</sup>

In 1987, while in prison, he became “an evangelical Christian. Instead of ‘Son of Sam,’ he now prefers ‘Son of Hope’ as seen in his book, *Son of Hope: The Prison Journals of David Berkowitz* (2006) and featured on his website (run by his supporters because he is not allowed access to the Internet). In his book and on the site, he provides an apology to his victims and their families.”<sup>68</sup> He refused to be paroled, saying: “In all honesty, I believe that I deserve to be in prison for the rest of my life. I have, with God's help, long ago come to terms with my situation and I have accepted my punishment.”<sup>69</sup>

“Tough-love” can bring humans back to God. However, for every David Richard Berkowitz (renamed after his adoption), there are many more Jeffrey Dahmer (17 murders and

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<sup>64</sup> Mary Mavromatis, “Serial Arson: Repetitive Firesetting and Pyromania,” 89.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Brody, *Son of Sam: A Biography of David Berkowitz*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.biography.com/people/david-berkowitz-9209372>

<sup>67</sup> Elliott Leyton, *Hunting Humans: The Rise of the Modern Multiple Murderer*, 203.

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.biography.com/people/david-berkowitz-9209372>

<sup>69</sup> <https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2002/07/09/son-of-sam.htm>

cannibalism), Ted Bundy (30-100 murders), and John Wayne Gacy (33+ murders). Everyone is free to go his own way and do what is right in his own eyes. No one is forced to acknowledge God or coerced to believe in his existence.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, in “tough-love,” God stands ready to welcome back his prodigal son whether his name is “the Zodiac killer”<sup>71</sup> or “the Son of Sam.”

### **3.6 Support for the Third Premise.**

(3) In his disapproval, God may not intervene in humans’ environment to prevent natural evils.

In the “tough-love” proposal, the natural laws of the universe may proceed without God’s interference.<sup>72</sup> Commonplace events (e.g., forest fires, earthquakes) will continue, bringing both good and evil outcomes to human existence on earth. Miraculous interventions from God to prevent tsunamis, tornadoes, devastating floods . . . should not be presumed, nor can these calamities be blamed on him (e.g., “Acts of God” in insurance parlance).

Humans’ impact on the environment (e.g., air and water pollution, greenhouse gases, toxic wastes) is their responsibility to solve and mitigate. Their poor choices (e.g., houses built on flood plains or seismic fault lines, deforestations) may bring dire consequences, for which they have no one to blame but themselves.

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<sup>70</sup> We are talking mostly of the USA.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Graysmith, *Zodiac*.

<sup>72</sup> In love, grace, and mercy, God may continue to provide for his creatures through rain and sunshine. God may also choose to intervene to prevent natural evils if he sees fit. However, in the “Tough-love Proposal,” God cannot be expected or required to intervene.

Animal pain and suffering will continue unabated (e.g., “the survival of the fittest”) according to its natural laws.<sup>73</sup> Humans may take some measures to alleviate such afflictions (e.g., adopt a pet) or they may choose to assert their dominant status on earth (e.g., sport hunting, cock fighting). God’s intervention to protect certain species from human eradication,<sup>74</sup> to cause harmful bacteria or viruses to self-destruct, to prevent the evolution of non-human carnivores, to supply unlimited natural resources, or to provide ample room for all populations to expand<sup>75</sup> should not be expected. God gave people the earth and its finite resources to manage and it is up to them to do it with or without God’s help and counsel.

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<sup>73</sup> Should humans (who do not believe in God’s existence) expect God to make a different and “better” universe with “better” natural laws for them to enjoy? Should God create “a world operating by natural laws in which the greater good is achieved and natural evil is nonexistent” just for their benefit? Should they demand “a world of miracles and rational choice,” “a mixed world of natural laws and miracles,” or “a statistical world and divine intervention” to satisfy their desires? See Michael Martin, “Reichenbach on Natural Evil,” 91–99. Rather, natural evil is the “outworking upon sentient creatures of the natural laws according to which God’s creation operates.” Bruce Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God*, 101. “Pain is an indispensable component of the evolutionary process after organisms have reached a certain stage of complexity. And, for all we know, the amount of pain that organisms have experienced in the actual world, or some amount morally equivalent to that amount, is necessary for the natural evolution of conscious animals.” Peter van Inwagen, “The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence,” 147. Commenting on Peter van Inwagen’s essay, Dr. Peterson wrote: “For God to bring about higher-level rational creatures apart from the laws of evolutionary development (for instance, by eliminating countless instances of animal suffering in evolutionary history) would be for God to create a massively irregular world, which is a defective world that cannot be preferred.” Michael Peterson, “Introduction,” 12. Dr. Hasker stated: “1. The actual universe is a complex, multileveled natural world, containing creatures that are sentient as well as some that are intelligent. The world has developed to its present state through a complex evolutionary process and enjoys a considerable amount of autonomy in its functioning. 2. The universe so constituted makes possible a large amount of good, both in the order and beauty of the physical universe and in the development and flourishing of a myriad of living creatures. It also unavoidably contains a great deal of suffering and death. 3. There is no good reason for us to suppose that some alternative order of nature, capable of being created by an all-powerful God, would surpass the present universe in its potentiality for good or in its balance of good versus evil.” William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 69–70. “As regards the possibility of a better overall plan of creation . . . Anyone who would base an argument from evil on a possibility such as this is whistling in a darkness so profound that no light is likely ever to shine into it.” (Ibid., 75–76). The “Tough-love Proposal” can accommodate both evolution and creationism. In creationism, God made various species de novo, thus avoiding the extensive animal pain and suffering of evolution.

<sup>74</sup> “Fully 396 species have gone extinct in 100 years. Under normal conditions (that is, without the presence of humans) that loss should have taken 11,400 years.” <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/humans-are-behind-the-mass-extinction-of-animals/>

<sup>75</sup> Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil.”

Once upon a time, in the land of the “Great Wall,” as part of the “Great Leap Forward,” the “Great Sparrow Campaign” was introduced with lavish fanfare. The “Great Leader” had been warned by his court sycophants that the innocent sparrows subsisted on a diet of fruit and grain seed, eating up some the “Great Helmsman’s” crops. As a result, the “Great Teacher” was rightfully worried about the dent the little creatures were making into his private GNP (Gross National Product). Rather than reckoning that it was just “for the birds,” and that all of God’s creatures had to eat, he wisely decided to take some drastic measures to preserve what was rightfully his. Since private farming was banned and all products (grains or otherwise) belonged to the state (AKA the “Great Supreme Commander”), sparrows were “stealing from the people” and therefore declared to be “enemies of the proletariat,” and sentenced to be eradicated as a species (i.e., the “nine familial exterminations” of the criminal, his spouse, his children, his grandchildren, his parents, his grandparents, his siblings and siblings-in-law, his uncles and aunts as well as their spouses, his cousins and his spouse’s parents).<sup>76</sup> No sooner ordered than done! Millions and millions of “volunteer citizens” chased the poor beasts around day and night, banging pots, pans, drums . . . to scare them into flying all over the vast country until they were exhausted from all the enforced exercise and dropped dead from the sky! Eggs and chicks that could not fly were summarily executed and their abode razed to the ground. Recalcitrant specimens that managed to stay aloft were shot down by designated marksmen. When many of the desperate feathered creatures asked for asylum and took refuge in the Polish embassy, the “Revered Leader’s” henchmen demanded the immediate extradition of the convicted criminals. Abruptly rebuffed, they besieged the building and proceeded to terrify the hapless escapees by a steady bedlam of banging and drumming. After two days of constant cacophony, there were so

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2760019/The-Merciless-Ming-The-Chinese-dynasty-unspeakably-cruel-one-debauched-history-produced-sublime-art-British-Museum.html>

many dead refugees in the embassy that the Poles had to use shovels to clear them.<sup>77</sup> The sparrow population was driven to near extinction as hundreds of millions of the birds were exterminated. The God-like<sup>78</sup> Mao Zedong's scheme succeeded beyond any wild expectation for the population of insects and locusts (previously held in check by the sparrows) borrowed a page from the "Great Chairman's" divine "Little Red Book," took a "Great Leap Forward," ballooned to biblical proportions, ravaged the crops, and contributed to the Great Chinese Famine of 1960 when 15 to 78 million people died of starvation.<sup>79</sup>

In "tough-love," God lets humans freely make decisions concerning their earthly abode, and to choose among options that may impact the cleanliness of its air, the purity of its water, the richness of its soil, and the balance of its ecology. As freedom entails responsibility and consequences, they must live and die in the environment of their own making whether it is Blessed Eden or Blighted Hades!<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, in love, God stands ready to help if and when they decide to acknowledge God's existence rather than insist that they are their own little deities and that all it takes for a "Great Leap Forward" on earth is a "Little Red Book" written by the "Great Teacher" of the "Land of the Red Dragon"!

### **3.7 The Argument Conclusion.**

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<sup>77</sup> <https://www.unbelievable-facts.com/2017/10/acts-of-mass-stupidity.html>

<sup>78</sup> Malcolm Moore, "In China, Chairman Mao still bigger than Jesus." Dec 25, 2013.

[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10537651/In-China-Chairman-Mao-still-bigger-than-Jesus.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10537651/In-China-Chairman-Mao-still-bigger-than-Jesus.html)

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/animals/stories/the-great-sparrow-campaign-was-the-start-of-the-greatest-mass>

<sup>80</sup> 15,364 scientists from 184 countries gave a catastrophic warning about the fate of humanity: "By failing to adequately limit population growth, reassess the role of an economy rooted on growth, reduce greenhouse gases, incentivize renewable energy, protect habitat, restore ecosystems, curb pollution, halt defaunation, and constrain invasive alien species, humanity is not taking the urgent steps needed to safeguard our imperiled biosphere." <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/letter-to-humanity-warning-climate-change-global-warming-scientists-union-concerned-a8052481.html>

(4) God and evil (moral and natural) can exist together.

If we accept the premises, the valid deductive argument leads to the conclusion that the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God can exist with evil. In the “Tough-love Proposal,” he is not responsible for the atrocities perpetrated on earth since humans deny his existence and insist on running their affairs as they see fit, unshackled by any outside interference. Naturally, the omnibenevolent God is not pleased with the horrendous evils (e.g., the Holocaust) perpetrated over the centuries with no sign of abatement (e.g., suicide bombings, the 2017 Las Vegas massacre . . .). Nevertheless, he will not force his will on humans as he wants a voluntary love relationship with his creatures, just as parents desire true (and willingly offered) love from their children. Thus, with great patience and long-suffering, God waits for humans to come to their senses, to realize that they need help from their creator and turn to him.

However, if they can solve their horrendous problems (e.g., poverty, starvation, threats of nuclear war, mass murders . . .) on their own without having to ask for his help (and thereby having to acknowledge his existence and start a relationship with him), he would probably (but reluctantly) accept the situation<sup>81</sup> as he wishes them no ill will (i.e., God is omnibenevolent and loves all his creatures).<sup>82</sup> St. Francis de Sales wrote concerning God’s love: “But I (God) grieve for their misfortune, that having left me, they have chosen for themselves wells that have no water. And if, by supposition of an impossible thing, they could have met with some other fountain of living water, I would lightly bear their departure from me, since I aim at nothing in

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<sup>81</sup> “I wish that you were cold or hot” (Revelation 3:15). Cold can refer to “no relationship” with God.

<sup>82</sup> “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,” John 3:16.



their love, but their own good. But to forsake me and perish, to fly from me headlong, is what astonishes and offends me in their folly.”<sup>83</sup>

Would any loving parent wish his/her children to get AIDS from continued drug use so that they might “learn their lessons” and return to the fold? Naturally, parents prefer to have a love relationship with their wayward children. Nevertheless, they are willing to settle for a “happy” life for their offspring even if it means a continued denial of the parents’ existence. In any case, they mostly stand ready to help, if and when their prodigal sons and daughters decide to return!

She was born with a heart condition, supraventricular tachycardia<sup>84</sup> that caused a very fast heartbeat. Her Christian parents named her Destiny Hope, believing that she would accomplish great things with her life. She surely did as she won a lead role in a show on cable television at the age of eleven. Before her move to Los Angeles from a small town in Tennessee, “she was baptized in a Southern Baptist church as a kind of spiritual insurance policy against big-city life.”<sup>85</sup> She wore a purity ring and attended church regularly during her formative years. Success followed success in Hollywood as she started cutting records, appeared in movies, and went on worldwide concert tours.

However, her relationship with her dad deteriorated when she appeared in provocative poses for *Vanity Fair*. She caused some more controversy by smoking salvia (a psychoactive plant) with a bong. In 2013, in an infamous MTV Video Music Awards performance of “Blurred Lines,” “the 24-year-old ‘Wrecking Ball’ star wore a flesh-colored bra and panties for the

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<sup>83</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, 445.

<sup>84</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20170304192429/http://www.mtv.com/news/1606651/miley-cyrus-opens-up-about-heart-condition/>

<sup>85</sup> <https://parade.com/131365/kevinsessums/miley-cyrus-4/>

raunchy routine, during which she stuck her tongue out while bending over and rubbing her behind on Thicke’s crotch.”<sup>86</sup> She blamed her “twerking phase” on spending too much time with her father. “I didn’t get a school escape like most people . . . I went to work with my dad . . . That was really hard.”<sup>87</sup> “Billy Ray expressed concern for Miley’s partying habits in an interview with GQ, saying that he was upset about her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday being held in a bar. He also said that if he could, he would go back in time and stop Miley from being in ‘Hannah Montana.’ ‘It destroyed my family,’ he said. ‘I’ll tell you right now—the damn show destroyed my family . . . I’d take it back in a second. For my family to be here and just be everybody okay, safe and sound and happy and normal, would have been fantastic.’”<sup>88</sup> However, there was nothing that Billy Ray Cyrus could do to stop Miley Cyrus (born Destiny Hope Cyrus, Miley being a nickname for the “smiley” baby) from living her life the way she wanted. She came out as a “pansexual,” “gender-fluid”<sup>89</sup> and acknowledged that “I love weed . . . I just love getting stoned.”<sup>90</sup> While she professed when she was seventeen, “I am a Christian, Jesus is who saved me,”<sup>91</sup> she later tweeted, “So forget Jesus. Stars died so you can live.”<sup>92</sup> “She also has an amazing family that has her back . . . In the end, as long as Miley is OK, her family can’t be anything but supportive.”<sup>93</sup> “Miley Cyrus and her father, Billy Ray Cyrus, have had a famously tumultuous relationship, but Miley says that things have improved.”<sup>94</sup> Billy Ray recently appeared as a guest coach with

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.newshub.co.nz/home/entertainment/2017/07/miley-cyrus-felt-sexualised-after-infamous-twerking-routine.html>

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-4509440/Miley-Cyrus-blames-twerking-phase-excess-time-dad.html>

<sup>88</sup> <http://theboot.com/miley-cyrus-billy-ray-cyrus-relationship/>

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/6598191/miley-cyrus-gender-fluid-nothing-to-do-with-any-parts>

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/miley-cyrus-ronan-farrow>

<sup>91</sup> <https://parade.com/131365/kevinsessums/miley-cyrus-4/>

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2112257/Miley-Cyrus-defends-forget-Jesus-tweet-responds-backlash.html>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.eonline.com/news/691302/billy-ray-cyrus-opens-up-about-daughter-miley-cyrus-sexuality-we-ve-always-been-very-open-minded>

<sup>94</sup> <http://theboot.com/miley-cyrus-billy-ray-cyrus-relationship/>

Miley on the Battle Rounds of *The Voice* where she “waxed lyrical about her father . . . calling him the perfect and only mentor.”<sup>95</sup> Will God reappear also in Miley’s life?

The “Tough-love Proposal” advocates that God (if he exists) allows humans to go their own way, resulting in some good but also in much evil. Without any coercion or undue pressure on God’s part (thus he appears to be absent or dead), they are free to decide to live independently from him or they may choose to acknowledge his existence and develop a relationship with him. Whichever option they select, they would have to live with the consequences, whether good or evil. In love, God patiently waits for them to return if and when they recognize the need to seek his help for their problems.

Thus, “tough love” is a morally justifying reason<sup>96</sup> for God to (reluctantly) allow evils (gratuitous or otherwise) in this world, a sensible answer to Rowe’s claim that it is *improbable* that an Omnigod can exist in the presence of gratuitous evils.

### **3.8 Conclusion.**

The “Tough-love Proposal” readily solves the logical problem of evil as it presents a *logically possible* scenario for the existence of God and evil (i.e., humans misuse their free will to separate themselves from God, deny his existence, and commit evil).<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the theory is well-supported by evidence from many fields of knowledge (e.g., parenting, history, ecology) and is intuitively correct as shown by the various case studies (e.g., the “Son of Sam” serial killer, Miley Cyrus).

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-5011199/The-Voice-Miley-Cyrus-calls-Billy-Ray-perfect-mentor.html>

<sup>96</sup> “God might fail to prevent suffering, or himself bring about suffering, while remaining perfectly good. It is required only that there be a morally sufficient reason for his action.” Nelson Pike, “Hume on Evil,” 41.

<sup>97</sup> Moral evils are the results of humans’ unwise actions. Natural evils happen according to natural laws without God’s interference.

Thus, in this chapter for non-theists, we have proposed a novel theodicy, the “Tough-love Proposal,” with three strong premises, supported solely by secular evidence, leading to the (deductive) logical conclusion that God can exist together with evils (gratuitous or otherwise). We have met the first three research objectives: “To defend the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God in the presence of gratuitous evil, to suggest a probable reason for the existence of horrendous and gratuitous evils (i.e., “tough-love), and to show that humans are responsible for the evils in this world” (page 7).

However, can the “Tough-love Proposal” answer the evidential argument from evil, as presented by Rowe?<sup>98</sup> To this problem we now focus our attention.

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<sup>98</sup> “Evidential arguments from evil attempt to show that, once we put aside any evidence there might be in support of the existence of God, it becomes unlikely, if not highly unlikely, that the world was created and is governed by an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good being. Such arguments are not to be confused with logical arguments from evil, which have the more ambitious aim of showing that, in a world in which there is evil, it is logically impossible—and not just unlikely—that God exists.” Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TOUGH-LOVE PROPOSAL AND THE EVIDENTIAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

#### 4.1 Introduction.

In the previous chapter, we have introduced a novel theodicy, the “Tough Love Proposal.” We have shown its well-supported premises, leading to the deductive conclusion that the Omnigod can exist with evils (gratuitous or otherwise). In this chapter, we will use the concept to address the “Evidential Problem of Evil” as presented by Dr. Rowe. As the evidential argument includes two premises (i.e., Factual and Theological), we will deal with each proposition separately. We will attempt to show that the suggested theodicy satisfactorily answers Rowe’s argument (i.e., sub-objective # 4 of this research project on page 8), and that the claim that it is *improbable* that the Omnigod can exist in the presence of gratuitous evils in the world is questionable.

First, as it is very difficult to prove whether evils in this world are gratuitous or non-gratuitous (as has been attempted unsuccessfully by many scholars mentioned in the literature review section), for the sake of discussion, we will grant Rowe’s first premise, that there are (*probably*) gratuitous evils. The “Tough Love Proposal” can accommodate *both* the presence and absence of gratuitous evils.

Second, we will mostly argue in this chapter that the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent creator does *not* prevent all gratuitous evils, contra Rowe. As mentioned in the research methodology section (page 8), we will use case studies as well as findings from other fields of knowledge (e.g., child rearing, social work) to support our points. Furthermore, we will

address the examples given by Dr. Rowe (“Bambi” E1 and “Sue” E2) and other scholars (the torture and murder of one innocent child in “The Brothers Karamazov”) to support the claim that God’s existence is not compatible with the presence of evil.

We contend that, in “tough love,” God does *not* prevent all evils (gratuitous or otherwise), a direct rebuttal of Rowe’s Theological Premise. Thus, we will meet our research objective of showing that God can exist in the presence of gratuitous evil.

#### **4.2 The Factual Premise.**

Concerning the Factual Premise (i.e., “There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse”<sup>1</sup> or for short, “There are gratuitous evils”), in the “Tough-love Proposal,” one can say that there are possibly<sup>2</sup> some gratuitous evils in the world as God lets humans go their own way and do what is right in their own eyes. They, being fallible creatures, are prone to act irrationally, out of sheer frothy emotions, resulting in senseless—and possibly gratuitous—evils (e.g., road rage). Even when they act (somewhat) rationally, it is difficult to show that their wanton actions (e.g., robberies) have any redeeming value. Although it may not be impossible to come up with some “good” for Auschwitz or Treblinka, as some have endeavored to show,<sup>3</sup> the threshold needed to convince most people that these horrendous

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<sup>1</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” 336.

<sup>2</sup> We cannot be dogmatic that gratuitous evils actually exist since we are not privy to all of God’s reasons for allowing certain evils. However, the “Tough-love Proposal” can accommodate *both* the presence and absence of gratuitous evils.

<sup>3</sup> [http://remember.org/what\\_good\\_can\\_come\\_of\\_the\\_holo.html](http://remember.org/what_good_can_come_of_the_holo.html)

events are for “the greater good” (or are necessary to prevent some even greater evils) is dauntingly high!

The “Tough-love Proposal” can accommodate either the presence or absence of gratuitous evils in the world. If one asserts that there are *no* gratuitous evils, that every suffering on earth happens for a “good reason” to bring about the “ultimate good,” the “Tough-love Proposal” would suggest that the “good” may be the *opportunity* for the prodigal son (i.e., humans) to *freely* (i.e., free will) reconcile and enter into a loving relationship with his father (i.e., God), if and when he comes to his senses and realizes that he needs some help for his dire problems. The evils, pains, and sufferings humans must endure are counterbalanced by the “greater good” of a freely chosen eternal fellowship with God (i.e., non-gratuitous evils).<sup>4</sup>

However, if people decide not to avail themselves of the opportunity to reconcile with their maker, or if they decide to do so only after much pain and suffering (when they could have changed their minds earlier), the evils they suffer may well be gratuitous as the “ultimate good” of a relationship with God through the acknowledgment of his existence is not achieved or only obtained after much “unnecessary”<sup>5</sup> (gratuitous?) sufferings. Thus, evils in a person’s life (e.g., cancer or imprisonment) may turn out to be “gratuitous” or “non-gratuitous,” “excessive in amount” or “unreasonably intense and prolonged,” *depending on the person’s response*.<sup>6</sup> In the

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Eleonore Stump proposes the ultimate good of a potential “union with God.” Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*. In addition to a “subsequent good” resulting from evil, John Feinberg proposes an “antecedent good” to counter the existence of gratuitous evil (e.g., the great good of giving humans free will). “An evil is gratuitous if it or its possibility has no antecedent good to which it is tied as an effect or by-product—presumably, the good that would cause it or is its concomitant would justify it.” John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 273.

<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to state with any certainty whether some particular evils are “unnecessary,” gratuitous, excessive in amount, too intense, or too prolonged (according to whose opinion?). Thus, a theodicy that does not have to rely on such determinations would be more versatile.

<sup>6</sup> “Achieving the goods in question requires a particular free response on the part of the sufferer, and some people, believe it or not, may ultimately be so perverse as to not love God no matter *how* horrific the torments he allows to befall them (emphasis in original).” Dustin Crummett, “Sufferer-Centered Requirements on Theodicy and All-Things-Considered Harms,” 75.

“Tough-love Proposal,” humans are free to determine their paths without God’s interference.<sup>7</sup>

The ultimate meanings of their pains and sufferings are therefore decided by them and them alone!

Mary was a “navy brat” moving from place to place during her childhood while her father was a navy pilot during the Vietnam War. She remembered the stress of being constantly uprooted, of missing her “absentee” dad, and having to attend her father’s fellow soldiers’ funerals. After college, she decided on a legal career, graduated with a law degree and married a fellow law student. They were soon blessed with a baby boy named Wade. At the age of 16, on spring break, young Wade was driving his shiny black Jeep Grand Cherokee from their home in Raleigh to their beach house in Wilmington when a “gust of wind” blew him off the road onto the median. According to his friend Tyler watching from the passenger seat, inexperienced Wade overcorrected and flipped the SUV, causing it to roll twice, land upside down and catch on fire.<sup>8</sup> Tyler got out, but Wade was trapped and died as they had to cut him out of the mangled car. Mary was heartbroken and reflected about the circumstances of her son’s death: “I had to think about a God who would not save my son. Wade was—and I have lots of evidence; it’s not just his mother saying it—a gentle and good boy . . . You’d think that if God was going to protect somebody, he’d protect that boy. But not only did he not protect him, the wind blew him from the road.”<sup>9</sup>

After Wade’s death, Mary and her husband decided to have more children. Almost past childbearing age, Mary underwent fertility treatments and had a girl at age 48 and a boy at 50. After a successful legal career, Mary’s husband chose to run for public office. While on the

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<sup>7</sup> However, humans do not have total free will to do whatever they want. For example, I do not have the free will to become an NBA player since I am only five feet four inches.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A40174-2001Aug6.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/elizabeth-edwards-realistic-about-her-prognosis-97625>



barnstorming trail, Mary discovered a lump in her breast. Undaunted, she carried on campaigning for her husband Johnny until he conceded defeat in 2004. Mary then underwent treatment for her stage 2 breast cancer, receiving chemotherapy, a lumpectomy, and radiation therapy.<sup>10</sup>

In December 2006, Johnny announced another run for political office on the site of Hurricane Katrina's devastation in New Orleans. In March 2007, Mary's cancer came back with a vengeance as she was diagnosed with a stage 4 breast cancer and metastases to her bones. Nevertheless, she soldiered on for her husband and the crusade proceeded without interruption. Johnny "continued to use his wife to boost his campaign, saying 'there is no one I admire more than my wife' and calling her 'my hero.'"<sup>11</sup>

However, the *National Enquirer* soon revealed that Johnny was having an affair with "a feisty unknown actress" (whom he put on the campaign payroll) and that she was carrying his child. Johnny ("John") Reid Edwards' effort to gain the democratic US presidential nomination imploded under the weight of the salacious news. Mary Elizabeth Edwards' world collapsed as she considered the shattering of their political dream, her impending death, her husband's betrayal, and the future step-mothering of her minor children by the hated rival. What could be done to remedy all these heartbreaking evils that came uninvited (and not because of one's doing)? Was it time to reconsider one's position about God and ask for his help?

Elizabeth Edwards decided: "I'm not praying for God to save me from cancer . . . The hand of God blew him (Wade) from the road. So, I had to think, what kind of God do I have that doesn't intervene—in fact, may even participate—in the death of this good boy?"<sup>12</sup> "I have, I

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/breast-cancer/news/20101207/elizabeth-edwards-dies-of-cancer#1>

<sup>11</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/john-edwards-mistress-breakdown-americas-sensational-scandals/story?id=20854336>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/elizabeth-edwards-dies-after-cancer-struggle-69041>

think, somewhat of an odd version of God. I do not have an intervening God. I don't think I can pray to him—or her—to cure me of cancer.”<sup>13</sup> Soon after, she died of metastatic breast cancer on December 7, 2010 at the age of 61.

Charles was born in Boston to a family of Swedish and British descent. After receiving his degree in history from Brown University, he did a two-year stint in the Marine Corps before getting a law degree from George Washington University. He was involved in politics and eventually founded a prominent law firm in the Washington DC area. In 1968, he left the practice to serve as Special Counsel to the President. He was known as the “hard man [sic], the ‘evil genius’ of an evil administration,”<sup>14</sup> the “hit man [sic],”<sup>15</sup> or “hatchet man [sic].”<sup>16</sup> He wrote in his memoir about his father’s trip to the White House when his dad was so proud of him that he thought his “father’s chest would explode.” “I knew, as Dad did not, that if I was as valuable to the President as he said I was, it was because I was willing at times to blink at certain ethical standards, to be ruthless in getting things done. It was earning me status and power.”<sup>17</sup>

This questionable behavior got him entangled in the Watergate Scandal as he was indicted for conspiring to cover up the burglary. He said concerning the bitter experience: “I was stripped of everything, public enemy number one.”<sup>18</sup> With the utter loss of status and power, the threat of being disbarred, the mounting legal fees, and the specter of a long prison sentence, was it time to reconsider one’s position concerning the existence of God and seek his help? Could God do anything at this late date when one’s back was against the wall, staring at disaster in the face?

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<sup>13</sup> Adele Stan, “The Original Theology of Elizabeth Edwards,” *The American Prospect*, July 30, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> David Plotz, “Charles Colson: How a Watergate Crook Became America’s Greatest Christian Conservative,” [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/assessment/2000/03/charles\\_colson.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/assessment/2000/03/charles_colson.html)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.upi.com/Colson-Nixons-hatchet-man-dead-at-80/23811335044902/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/aprilweb-only/charles-colson-aitken.html>

<sup>17</sup> Charles Colson, *Born Again*, 57.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www1.cbn.com/700club/chuck-colson-35-years-faith>

Tom Phillips, chairman of the board at Raytheon, gave Charles a copy of C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Charles ("Chuck") Wendell Colson became an evangelical Christian. After serving seven months of a one-to three-year sentence, he was released and founded Prison Fellowship, "an outreach to prisoners and their families . . . the largest prison ministry in the United States . . . active over 125 countries worldwide."<sup>20</sup>

From these accounts, are there gratuitous evils in the world, as claimed by Rowe's Factual Premise? Possibly yes, although one cannot be dogmatic about the matter. However, whether there are gratuitous evils or not, God can hardly be blamed for the sad state of affairs in society as humans insist on their independence and on doing things their way. This is not to say that they never do anything good for we all know that there is much good mingled with horrendous evils in this realm. In the "Tough-love Proposal," people are free to choose their paths without God's interference. However, freedom comes with full responsibility. Thus, they must live with the consequences of their actions whether good or evil. In the face of heart-wrenching evils and sufferings, whether of one's own making or not, Elizabeth Edwards and Chuck Colson made their choices about the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God, the same choice open to each and every one of us when we consider our own pains and turmoils on this earth.

The "Tough-love Proposal" can accommodate both the presence and absence of gratuitous evils in this world (i.e., the Factual Premise). How does it address Rowe's Theological Premise?

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<sup>19</sup> W. Terry Whalin, *Chuck Colson*, 69.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/2016/03/new-honor-chuck-colson/>

### 4.3 The Theological Premise.

Rowe's "Theological Premise" reads as follows: "An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse"<sup>21</sup> or "God prevents all gratuitous evils" for short.

In the "Tough-love Proposal," God does not necessarily prevent evils (whether gratuitous, diverse, excessive, intense, or prolonged) as he (reluctantly) allows humans to go their own way and affirm their independence from a "non-existent" God. The good and evil done on earth are their responsibilities and theirs alone.<sup>22</sup> As God is believed to be "dead," "absent," or "imaginary," he may choose to fulfill<sup>23</sup> the exact role that they have defined for him. However, he also stands ready to welcome back his creatures if and when they have a change of heart and decide to return to their creator.

Jo was the only surviving child of a poor, wife-beating, alcoholic shoemaker and a laundress. He contracted smallpox as a boy and was left with a pockmarked face. His mother finally escaped from the abusive relationship and moved to the house of a priest who arranged for Jo to attend a church day school reserved for the children of the clergy. Fortunately, Jo excelled in his studies and earned a scholarship to the Spiritual Seminary, joining 600 other

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<sup>21</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," 336.

<sup>22</sup> John Calvin said concerning God and his created world: "Now that we perceive God has created humanity in such wise that we should join forces, no one sparing what he can provide, but rather bringing all that we can to serve the common good, must this not incite us to such sharing?" John Calvin, *Men, Women and Order in the Church*, 49. Martin Luther advocated for the poor in his world in his 95 theses: "Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences."

<https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>. Dr. Jerry Pillay affirmed: "For Reformed Christians, involvement in the political and economic life of their country is clearly a matter of faith." Jerry Pillay, "An Exploration of the Idea of Ecodomy in Calvin's View of God and the World: Its Implications for Churches in South Africa Today," 10.

<sup>23</sup> The "Tough-love Proposal" does not claim that God's motives and reasons are precisely known. It only suggests some possible reasons why evil may exist in the presence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God.

aspirant priests boarding at the school. However, his ideas about God changed from reading Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. Jo reportedly said to a friend: "You know, they are fooling us. There is no god."<sup>24</sup> He declared himself an atheist,<sup>25</sup> got involved in Marxist propaganda and was expelled from the seminary. He became a political activist against the government and raised funds for the communist party by staging robberies, running protection rackets, counterfeiting currencies,<sup>26</sup> and kidnapping children for ransom.<sup>27</sup> He was arrested many times and sentenced to prison and Siberian exiles.

After the Russian revolution of 1917 and the death of his protégé Lenin in 1924, Joseph Stalin (birth name Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, code named "Stalin" meaning "Man of steel") outmaneuvered his rivals and became the dictator of the Soviet Union. He followed in the footsteps of Lenin who once wrote: "Marx said, 'Religion is the opium of the people'-- and this postulate is the corner stone of the whole philosophy of Marxism with regard to religion."<sup>28</sup> In 1932, Stalin promulgated "The five year plan of atheism" with the stated goal that "not a single house of prayer shall remain in the territory of the USSR, and the very concept of God must be banished from the Soviet Union."<sup>29</sup> "The main target of the anti-religious campaign in the 1920s and 1930s was the Russian Orthodox Church, which had the largest number of faithful. Nearly all of its clergy, and many of its believers, were shot or sent to labor camps. Theological schools were closed, and church publications were prohibited. By 1939 only about 500 of over 50,000 churches remained open."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/murphy-jt/1945/stalin/01.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Simon Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 70–71.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography*, 74. Simon Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 196.

<sup>27</sup> Simon Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 197–98.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Dixon, "Religion in the Soviet Union," *Workers International News*, October 1945.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/anti.html>

Stalin also orchestrated the “Great Terror” or “Great Purge” of 1936–1938, resulting in the death of 600,000 people, including members of the Communist party, government officials, and Red Army leadership. The total death toll from Stalin’s hands appears to be about 20 million souls,<sup>31</sup> the whole population of New York, Florida, or Romania. Where was God in this mass murder? Why did he not intervene and stop the wholesale butchery? Did he not care about his defenseless creatures? Stalin concluded: “God’s not unjust, he doesn’t actually exist. We’ve been deceived. If God existed, he’d have made the world more just.”<sup>32</sup> Whether Stalin was correct about the existence of God remains to be seen since, according to the Pew Research Center, “between 1991 and 2008, the share of Russian adults identifying as Orthodox Christian rose from 31% to 72%.”<sup>33</sup>

Does God prevent all the (diverse, gratuitous, excessive, intense, or prolonged) evils in this world? The “Tough-love Proposal” suggests that he does not do so. Humans are free to exercise their will without any interference. If they encounter setbacks, they may realize on their own that they are inadequate for their onerous tasks and decide to return to their creator for help.

However, if they are happy with their decision to pursue their own desires (as some people are),<sup>34</sup> if they do not mind occasional reversals in their lives (e.g., evils, pains, and sufferings), they are free to persist in their conviction that God is non-existent. To these persons, God is for all practical purposes “dead,” validating their beliefs and proving that they are “correct” in their assessment of the situation. Thus, when non-theists encounter evils, such

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<sup>31</sup> <http://necrometrics.com/20c5m.htm#Stalin>

<sup>32</sup> Simon Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/02/10/russians-return-to-religion-but-not-to-church/>

<sup>34</sup> “The major civilizing force in the world is not religion, it is sex.” Hugh Hefner.

[https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/hugh\\_hefner](https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/hugh_hefner)

“Don’t kid yourself that you’re going to live again after you’re dead; you’re not. Make the most of the one life you’ve got. Live it to the full.” Richard Dawkins. [https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/richard\\_dawkins](https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/richard_dawkins)

“Of course, I do everything for money.” Christopher Hitchens.

[https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/christopher\\_hitchens](https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/christopher_hitchens)

calamities are often deemed gratuitous (e.g., a product of random chance or of other people's twisted wills) for God is a figment of one's imagination or an absentee landlord in that slice of the experiential universe. In that environment, there is no God, religion is a "pox"<sup>35</sup> of humanity and evils are just the normal consequences of life, serving no defined purposes and having no redeeming values.

Theists may face the exact same difficulties as non-theists (e.g., cancer, robberies). However, the evils are now thought to be "non-gratuitous" for God is believed to be alive and active, bringing good out of evil with an eye toward a positive final outcome!<sup>36</sup> Theists and non-theists are free to live their lives as they see fit. They may believe or disbelieve in God's existence. They may choose to live their lives in the here and now without any thought for the hereafter or they may decide to soldier on in this fleeting and often challenging existence, looking forward to the rewards in the world to come. Everyone is free to make his or her own choice.<sup>37</sup> May we do so wisely and live at peace with one another!

The "Tough-love Proposal" argues that God, although omnibenevolent, does *not* necessarily prevent all gratuitous evils (contra Rowe's Theological Premise) since humans insist on living as they see fit and denying God's existence. In the words of Peter van Inwagen, after suffering much evil, we may become "*dissatisfied* with our state of separation from Him

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<sup>35</sup> "The reason why the ancient world was so pure, light, and serene was that it knew nothing of the two great scourges: the pox and Christianity." Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Table Talk*, 48. "I think a case can be made that faith is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate." Richard Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion?" 26.

<sup>36</sup> For example, "union with God" in heaven.

<sup>37</sup> Of course, God, as a loving creator, wants people to return to him. The persistent efforts of the churches and the parachurch organizations spread God's message of forgiveness and reconciliation far and wide!

(emphasis in original).”<sup>38</sup> We can then choose either to turn back to God or continue in our path of “freedom and independence.” The choice is ours and ours alone and so are the consequences!

#### 4.4 The Case of “Bambi” (E1).

“In some distant forest, lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering.”<sup>39</sup>

The Tough-love Proposal’s third premise states: “In his disapproval, God may not intervene in humans’ environment to prevent natural evils.” Forest fires have occurred since time immemorial, even before the appearance of humans on earth.<sup>40</sup> “We often regard fire as an agent of destruction, but to Nature, it is an agent of necessary change. Fire changes one form of energy to another. Green plants change light energy to chemical energy, fire changes chemical energy to heat energy.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, forest fires are natural occurrences that serve a great purpose in the ecological balance. After much effort to prevent *all* fires, people have finally learned that controlled burn or “prescribed fire appears to be the most effective means for controlling the rate of spread and severity of wildfire.”<sup>42</sup> In the “Tough-love Proposal,” nature may be allowed to proceed without God’s interference, resulting in occasional fawns being trapped and killed in wildfires. Animals’ pains and sufferings may just be the result of natural laws in effect in the

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy,” 381. The “Tough-love Proposal” takes a more passive approach. It differs from van Inwagen’s theodicy which advocates God’s active plan to make “it as difficult as possible for us to delude ourselves about the kind of world we live in.” (Ibid., 381).

<sup>39</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” 336.

<sup>40</sup> The 2019–2020 devastating bush fire in Australia is blamed partially on climate change. “The prime minister, Scott Morrison, has acknowledged that climate change has had an influence on the fires and has defended his government’s climate record.” <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/13/explainer-what-are-the-underlying-causes-of-australias-shocking-bushfire-season>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Florida-Forest-Service/Wildland-Fire/Prescribed-Fire/The-Natural-Role-of-Fire>

<sup>42</sup> [http://www.pacificbio.org/initiatives/fire/fire\\_ecology.html](http://www.pacificbio.org/initiatives/fire/fire_ecology.html)



universe (e.g., “the survival of the fittest”) for “a world without natural laws would be a much worse world.”<sup>43</sup>

The “Tough-love Proposal” can accommodate the event of Bambi’s death as either a gratuitous or non-gratuitous evil. Bambi’s demise may not be gratuitous (either in the absence of humans or in their presence), due to the “greater good” of the preservation of natural laws for the welfare of all earthly sentient and free creatures,<sup>44</sup> resulting in the occasional wildfires from lightning and the death of some (e.g., not the fastest) fawns.<sup>45</sup> Bambi’s suffering may be gratuitous (in the presence of humans) because of human actions (e.g., a lingering and painful demise from humans’ intentional arson or from humans’ sport arrow). In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God may let humans’ environment go its own way and not miraculously intervene by occasionally suspending natural laws,<sup>46</sup> changing the laws of physics into probabilistic laws,<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil,” Section 7.4

<sup>44</sup> “The natural evils which human persons (and animals) experience (by and large) are not willed by God, but are the consequences of the outworking upon sentient creatures of the natural laws according to which God’s creation operates . . . They are the by-products made possible by that which was necessary for the greater good.” Bruce Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God*, 101–102.

<sup>45</sup> The four available permutations of Man (M) and gratuitousness of Bambi’s death (G) are: G ~M, ~G ~M, G M, ~G M. Bambi’s death in the absence of Man may be deemed “gratuitous” due the randomness of destructive events like earthquakes (G ~M). The non-gratuitousness of Bambi’s death in the absence of Man (~G ~M) is the great good of the preservation of natural laws for all creatures (e.g., lightning-caused forest fires). The “gratuitousness” of Bambi’s death in the presence of Man (G, M) can be seen in a case of wanton arson fire. The non-gratuitousness of Bambi’s death in the presence of Man (~G M) is seen in a case of controlled burning to prevent devastating out of control fires (a great good to prevent danger for a large number of humans and animals).

<sup>46</sup> Although the omnipotent God can suspend natural laws, in “tough-love,” he may not interfere either with humans or with their environment. Miraculous interventions to prevent natural and/or moral evils cannot be expected. Furthermore, God’s actions and interference to prevent natural evils may be counterproductive. “If this absence of universal and necessary connections is widespread, as would seem to be required in order to prevent all natural evils, the world would have few if any natural laws . . . the consequences of it still would be such as to make rational prediction and rational action impossible, and hence to make moral action impossible.” Bruce Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God*, 108.

<sup>47</sup> Probabilistic laws are part of the universe at the micro level (e.g., atoms in Quantum Mechanics). At the macro level (our everyday life), classical Newtonian deterministic mechanics apply. “In standard quantum mechanics, probabilistic laws are taken to *replace* classical mechanics . . . By contrast, in classical statistical mechanics, probabilistic laws are *supplementary* to the underlying deterministic mechanics, or perhaps even reducible to it (emphasis in original).” Yemima Ben-Menahem and Meir Hemmo eds., *Probability in Physics*, 2. A world with probabilistic laws may not be ideal. For example, would any astronaut be willing to fly to the moon knowing that the laws of physics are not deterministic (i.e., fixed) but only probabilistic? How can a judge uphold any speeding ticket if the physical measurements are subject to probabilistic laws? Would anyone go on a roller coaster if the laws of physics are only probabilistic (even with a “high” probability)?

working in secret to prevent natural disasters,<sup>48</sup> altering the physiological parameters by giving humans an on/off button to control their pains,<sup>49</sup> preventing the appearance of non-human carnivores,<sup>50</sup> causing harmful organisms to self-destruct,<sup>51</sup> or providing unlimited natural resources.<sup>52</sup> Humans are limited by the boundaries and laws of their universe, the available natural resources of the earth, and the vagaries of the environment. As they have decided to act independently of God, God may grant them their wish and not intervene<sup>53</sup> in their affairs. In love, God patiently waits for them to return,<sup>54</sup> if and when they realize that they need their creator's help to solve the dire problems of their fragile environment.

#### 4.5 The Case of “Sue” (E2).

*“A report in the Detroit Free Press of January 3, 1986, runs as follows:*

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<sup>48</sup> In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God may not want to prevent natural disasters. Natural evils may serve to bring people back to God. “Haiti Earthquake: Religion Fills the Void Left by Aid Agencies.” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/24/haiti-religion-aid-shortfall>

<sup>49</sup> This on/off pain button scheme is counterproductive and downright dangerous. Pain in the body can be likened to a brake warning light in the car. Does anyone really want to turn off the brake warning light without fixing the brakes? In any case, we already have a pain on/off button: it is called drugs.

<sup>50</sup> According to science, non-human carnivores are a natural part of evolution and thus cannot be prevented. “Scientists have linked increasing oxygen levels and the rise and evolution of carnivores (meat eaters) as the force behind a broad explosion of animal species and body structures millions of years ago.”

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/07/130731093310.htm>

Even plants have evolved into carnivores. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-plants-evolved-into-carnivores/>

<sup>51</sup> “Since the 1970s, about 40 new infectious diseases have been discovered, including SARS, MERS, Ebola, chikungunya, avian flu, swine flu and, most recently, Zika.” [www.bcm.edu/departments/molecular-virology-and-microbiology/emerging-infections-and-biodefense/emerging-infectious-diseases](http://www.bcm.edu/departments/molecular-virology-and-microbiology/emerging-infections-and-biodefense/emerging-infectious-diseases)

COVID-19, HIV, SARS, MERS, Ebola, chikungunya, avian flu, swine flu and Zika are all viral diseases that are new to humans as they are believed to be transmitted from animals. “Population pressure, climate change and ecological degradation may be contributing to a situation where zoonosis – the movement of a disease from a vertebrate animal to a human host – is more common.” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2017-01-03/5-diseases-to-watch-out-for-in-2017>

Should humans expect God to prevent new diseases from appearing due to their shortsighted actions against nature?

<sup>52</sup> These suggestions are proposed by Dr. Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil” section 7.4.

<sup>53</sup> Of course, God may choose to intervene and prevent some natural evils if he so desires.

<sup>54</sup> As said before, God still actively works through the Holy Spirit, the Church, the parachurch organizations . . .

*The girl's mother was living with her boyfriend, another man [sic] who was unemployed, her two children, and her 9-month old infant fathered by the boyfriend. On New Year's Eve all three adults were drinking at a bar near the woman's home. The boyfriend had been taking drugs and drinking heavily. He was asked to leave the bar at 8:00 p.m. After several reappearances he finally stayed away for good at about 9:30 p.m. The woman and the unemployed man [sic] remained at the bar until 2:00 a.m. at which time the woman went home and the man [sic] to a party at a neighbor's home. Perhaps out of jealousy, the boyfriend attacked the woman when she walked into the house. Her brother was there and broke up the fight by hitting the boyfriend who was passed out and slumped over a table when the brother left. Later the boyfriend attacked the woman again, and this time she knocked him unconscious. After checking the children, she went to bed. Later the woman's 5-year old girl went downstairs to go to the bathroom. The unemployed man [sic] returned from the party at 3:45 a.m. and found the 5-year old dead. She had been raped, severely beaten over most of her body and strangled to death by the boyfriend.*"<sup>55</sup>

The Tough-love Proposal's second premise states: "In his disapproval, God lets humans go their own way (resulting in good and evil from their free will) and, in love, patiently waits for them to return, an approach popularly known as 'tough-love.'" Should self-governing humans expect some miraculous intervention from God to prevent the drinking, drug taking, and fighting culminating in rape and murder? For good or evil, all the adults in the heartbreaking events *freely chose to do* what they did. The girl's mother agreed to have the boyfriend live with her children. She also allowed another unemployed man to stay with them. They all decided to go drinking at a bar (leaving the children home alone?). After fighting with the woman and her brother, the

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<sup>55</sup> Nick Trakakis, "The Evidential Problem of Evil."

drug-taking boyfriend decided to rape and murder the five-year-old girl. Who was to blame for the horrendous evils? God or humans?<sup>56</sup> Mark Twain said: “There are many scapegoats for our blunders, but the most popular one is Providence.”<sup>57</sup>

Was the outcome of the story surprising? “One of the most-frequently cited pieces of research on the subject is a 1992 article in *Child Abuse and Neglect* by Leslie Margolin. By conducting interviews with nearly 1,000 Iowa women and combing through data from the Iowa Department of Human Services, Margolin found that mother’s boyfriends were responsible for 64 percent of non-parental abuse in single-parent families, despite performing less than 2 percent of non-parental child care.”<sup>58</sup> A study in 2001 found that “children who had a father surrogate living in the home were twice as likely to be reported for maltreatment after his entry into the home than those with either a biological father . . . or no father figure in the home.”<sup>59</sup> Another study in 2002 reported that “children residing in households with adults unrelated to them were 8 times more likely to die of maltreatment than children in households with 2 biological parents . . . Risk of maltreatment death also was elevated for children residing with step, foster, or adoptive

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<sup>56</sup> Commenting on Michael Bergmann and Daniel Howard-Snyder’s essay, Rowe said: “My friends, however, do seem to think that we can conceive of goods that may require God to permit at least some of these awful evils. They suggest that for all we know the following complex good may occur: the little five-year-old girl meets up with her rapist-killer somewhere in the next life, and he then repents and begs her forgiveness for savagely beating, raping, and strangling her, and she then forgives him, with the result that both of them live happily ever after in the presence of God.” William Rowe, “Reply to Howard-Snyder and Bergmann,” 160. The “Tough-love Proposal” does *not* advocate that Sue’s rape and murder are the results of an antecedent good (e.g., free will of the rapist) or necessarily lead to a subsequent positive outcome (e.g., repentance of the murderer and reconciliation with the victim in the afterlife). Dr. Oppy said: “I find it no less obscene and unspeakable to suppose that her rape, beating, and murder were *necessary* for *her* to acquire nominated greater goods after she was dead – for example, eternal divine felicity (emphases in original).” Graham Oppy, “Rowe’s Evidential Arguments from Evil,” 53. The “Tough-love Proposal” does *not* advocate that Sue’s sufferings are *necessary* for any greater good. Rather, Sue’s “eternal felicity” is God’s *redeeming work* (i.e., turning humans’ evil into good for the sake of the innocent party *without excusing or condoning* the evil that was done, Genesis 50:20). Sue’s neglect, rape, and murder are evils committed by people who insist on living independently from God and ignoring his commands (e.g., You shall not murder, Exodus 20:13).

<sup>57</sup> Mark Twain, *Mark Twain’s Notebook*, 347.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-are-mothers-boyfriends-so-likely-to-kill>

<sup>59</sup> Radhakrishna et al. “Are Father Surrogates a Risk factor for Child Maltreatment?” 281–89.

parents . . . and in households with other adult relatives present . . . Risk of maltreatment death was not increased for children living with only 1 biological parent.”<sup>60</sup> In 2010, the rate of physical abuse is ten times higher in the “single parent with partner” than “married biological parents.” The rate of sexual abuse is also seventeen times higher.<sup>61</sup>

Unfortunately, the frontline workers tasked with managing the problem (e.g., Child Protective Services) are overwhelmed. “Large caseloads and excessive workloads in many jurisdictions can make it difficult for child welfare caseworkers to serve families effectively and reducing and managing caseloads and workloads are not simple tasks for child welfare administrators.”<sup>62</sup> “When children die in Pennsylvania, a lot of times, these are families that were on someone’s radar . . . We know they're under stress, but we don't connect them to proven services that potentially help to mitigate or resolve that stress. Then we all act a little surprised and outraged when something bad happens to that child. But we knew.”<sup>63</sup>

Like Dr. Oppy,<sup>64</sup> should we be outraged at God for not protecting Sue and other children like her? If we believe that God is “dead” or just a figment of our imagination, why should we waste our breath and blame him for our troubles?<sup>65</sup> Whose responsibility is it to deter the evils in the world when humans insist on their rights to control their own destiny (e.g., to drink, take

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<sup>60</sup> Stiffman et al. “Household Composition and Risk of Fatal Child Maltreatment,” 615–21.

<sup>61</sup> Andrea Sedlak et al. (2010). Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS–4): Report to Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, page 5–32. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nis4\\_report\\_congress\\_full\\_pdf\\_jan2010.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nis4_report_congress_full_pdf_jan2010.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/case-work-management/>

<sup>63</sup> Eleanor Klibanoff, “Proactive Child Abuse Prevention Gets Increased Attention as Fatalities Rise in PA.” <http://wesa.fm/post/proactive-child-abuse-prevention-gets-increased-attention-fatality-rate-rises-pa#stream/0>

<sup>64</sup> Dr. Oppy said: “I think that nothing could justify inaction in the face of rape, torture, and murder of five-year-old girls other than inability (on grounds of lack of power, or knowledge, or the like).” Graham Oppy, “Rowe’s Evidential Arguments from Evil,” 59. However, is God *responsible* for the evil outcome? Should we blame God or ourselves for the unspeakable evils committed on earth?

<sup>65</sup> “I don’t believe in leprechauns, but I haven’t dedicated my life to battling them . . . I would *not* get angry with leprechauns. Why not? Because I can’t get angry with someone I know doesn’t exist (emphasis in original).” Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil*, 136.

drugs) without God's interference? Is it reasonable to demand complete freedom to do whatever we want and yet expect that God will somehow bail us (and our children) out from our self-caused disasters? Can we have a non-related adult (addicted to drugs and alcohol) live with our defenseless children and *rely on God to protect them from harm*? Can we settle our differences with physical violence and hope that God will shield us from all injuries?

Can we demand God to intervene worldwide on a massive scale<sup>66</sup> to prevent the adults' evil actions from impacting their children?<sup>67</sup> Should God hinder every drunk from driving his/her car with the children inside? Should God block every pregnant woman from using drugs? Should God prohibit all smokers from releasing secondhand smoke that may harm their babies? Should God thwart all gamblers from spending the family food budget? Should God forbid all mothers with young children from having live-in boyfriends? The English poet John Donne wrote: "No human is an island, entire of itself; every human is a piece of the continent."<sup>68</sup> We do not live in a vacuum. Our ill-conceived actions may have severe repercussions on many innocent people around us (e.g., our children). Dr. John Cottingham stated that we need "to come to terms with our own 'evil doings' . . . and to realize how these impact the lives of others."<sup>69</sup>

While collective punishment (of adults and children) is not a popular notion and its track record is unclear,<sup>70</sup> it has nevertheless been used widely as a punitive and deterrent tool in

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<sup>66</sup> "If God were to prevent bad actions from having bad consequences, God would constantly have to perform miracles, which would mean that the natural world would become massively irregular." René van Woudenberg, "A Brief History of Theodicy," 178.

<sup>67</sup> This continuous and blatant divine intervention would pressure/coerce non-theists into believing in God's existence. In the current situation, while the children may be impacted by the adults' evil actions, Jesus promised them a future eternal life in heaven. "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14).

<sup>68</sup> John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions and Death's Duel*, 102.

<sup>69</sup> John Cottingham, "Evil and the Meaning of Life," 26.

<sup>70</sup> Gao et al. "Collective Punishment is More Effective than Collective Reward for Promoting Cooperation," 17752. Eric Dickson, On the (In)effectiveness of Collective Punishment: An Experimental Investigation. Working Paper, University of Rochester. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.296.9155&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

society. Youth football seasons have been cancelled (as a collective punishment for the whole team) over bullying and hazing among some players,<sup>71</sup> for kneeling during the national anthem,<sup>72</sup> or for racial insensitivity.<sup>73</sup> Entire groups of adults and children from various countries were indiscriminately penalized by the 2017 US immigration ban ordered by the President. “The children most at risk are Syrian, whether they have fled as refugees or are still in their country, according to UNICEF, the United Nations’ children’s agency. All Syrians have been barred indefinitely from entering the United States.”<sup>74</sup> In 2016, a collective punishment of all US Marines in Japan was declared following rapes and a murder. “Troops who live on base will not be allowed to drink alcohol when they’re off base . . . Troops eating out at restaurants may not drink alcohol with their meals and all local clubs and bars are off-limits. They must be back in their residences by Midnight.”<sup>75</sup> Collective punishment was also used in the workplace under the guise of a “bonus” pay. “There is the possibility of earning a 12 percent bonus each month, but only if there are no mistakes in terms of work safety, productivity and inventory accuracy. The 12 percent is almost never achieved . . . The bonus points apply to the whole department. This means that the mistake of an individual worker can mean all workers are ‘punished.’”<sup>76</sup> Collective punishments of adults and their children are also advocated in eastern

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.mtv.com/news/1957116/sayreville-cancel-football-hazing-bullying/>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.aol.com/article/sports/2016/10/19/youth-football-team-gets-season-cancelled-after-kneeling-during/21587010/>

<sup>73</sup> [http://www.richmond.com/news/local/henrico/football-season-canceled-for-short-pump-middle-school-after-disturbing/article\\_33cdb41a-406d-5894-bbc9-1037f7fb8cde.html](http://www.richmond.com/news/local/henrico/football-season-canceled-for-short-pump-middle-school-after-disturbing/article_33cdb41a-406d-5894-bbc9-1037f7fb8cde.html)

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/world/middleeast/trump-immigration-ban-children.html>

<sup>75</sup> <http://usmclife.com/2016/05/mass-punishment-marines-japan-following-recent-crimes/>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/05/31/leip-m31.html>

as well as western religions (e.g., Judaism,<sup>77</sup> Christianity,<sup>78</sup> Islam,<sup>79</sup> Buddhism,<sup>80</sup> and Hinduism).<sup>81</sup>

Thus, should we expect God to miraculously intervene and prevent the natural consequences of our actions on our children,<sup>82</sup> dreadful outcomes that may well lead to the deaths of our offspring (e.g., “Sue”)?<sup>83</sup> Should self-seeking individuals blame God for applying collective punishments, and for not bailing them and their children out of their self-inflicted disasters? Nevertheless, in “tough-love,” God patiently waits for all to return to him and will

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<sup>77</sup> God punished the whole nation of Israel, and the entire family of Achan (including his sons and daughters) for Achan’s sin in Joshua 7.

<sup>78</sup> God holds the churches responsible for the actions of their individual members (Revelation 2–3).

<sup>79</sup> “People should bear in mind that if they fail to participate wholeheartedly in the task to which they were invited and remain silent spectators to rampant evils, that would invite a scourge that would embrace all. It would afflict even those individuals who neither themselves committed evils nor were instrumental in spreading them and who might in fact have been righteous in their personal conduct.” Commentary on Sura 8:25 of the Quran.

<http://www.islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=8&verse=20>

<sup>80</sup> “It is commonly thought that the karma doctrine of Buddhism embraces a strict nexus of individualistic retribution . . . in fact, however, there are texts that point to special circumstances in which there is collective action and collective karmic retribution. Altruistic acts by leaders can lift the whole, whereas evil plotted and done by them can lead to collective punishment.” Todd Lewis, “Altruism in Classical Buddhism,” 102.

<sup>81</sup> “Actions performed as groups also give rise to collective karma that would impact their collective future. According to this belief, nations, organizations and associations also incur karma because of the collective actions and decisions of the people who are part of them. If a nation is oppressed by another, people belonging to the nation that is acting as the oppressor incur bad karma and have to repay for the actions of their country through their own lives.” [http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h\\_karma.asp](http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h_karma.asp)

<sup>82</sup> The sins of the fathers may be visited on the children as in the transmission of syphilis. R. Bianucci and A. Perciaccante, “The Sins of the Fathers Will Be Visited Upon the Children: Congenital Syphilis and Leg Braces Pictorial Depiction in Eighteenth Century Britain.” 36–37. “Children born of conflict-related sexual violence face a distinct set of challenges and needs that have yet to be formally addressed.” Myriam Denov et al. “The Intergenerational Legacy of Genocidal Rape: The Realities and Perspectives of Children Born of the Rwandan Genocide.” Children of illegal immigrants suffer from the sins of their fathers. Alfredo Gutierrez, “The Sins of the Fathers: The Children of Undocumented Immigrants Pay the Price.”

<https://americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/sins-fathers-children-undocumented-immigrants-pay-price>

<sup>83</sup> Drs. Marilyn McCord Adams and Eleonore Stump advocate that the evils encountered in life will be balanced by some greater goods (e.g., a wonderful afterlife) for each individual. “At a minimum, God’s *goodness* to human individuals would require that God guarantee each a life that was a great good to him/her on the whole by balancing off serious evils.” Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 31. “I want to suggest that Christian doctrine is committed to the claim that a child’s suffering is outweighed by the good for the child which can result from that suffering.” Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 410. Dr. Albert Mohler, the president of *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* said: “Knowing neither good nor evil, these young children are incapable of committing sins in the body – are not yet moral agents – and die secure in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” <https://albertmohler.com/2009/07/16/the-salvation-of-the-little-ones-do-infants-who-die-go-to-heaven/> Thus, “Sue” would experience a blessed afterlife in heaven. Her murderer would be brought to God’s justice. “Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).



eagerly *help them sort out their problems*. In his holiness, God does not condone evils but, in love, is willing to patiently forbear with his creatures and forgive them when they repent and return to him.<sup>84</sup>

Mike was one of twelve children born to an alcoholic and crack cocaine addicted mom and a felon father who was murdered in prison. Due to the family turmoil, Mike did poorly in school, had to repeat first and second grades, was put in various foster homes and often ended homeless. His IQ was measured at 80, in the bottom 9<sup>th</sup> percentile. Mike “was enrolled in 11 different institutions, and that included a gap of 18 months, around age 10, when he apparently did not attend school at all.”<sup>85</sup>

Betty Boo was a party girl; she smoked, drank, and ran around. “Then suddenly, in 1973, she gave up alcohol, then her three-pack-a day cigarette habit, [sic] then sin itself. She announced she had been saved, and accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior—and spent the next twenty-five years mailing pamphlets and pressing Christian literature and videos into people’s hands.”<sup>86</sup> Betty Boo had a son, “Big Tony,” a 400-pound auto mechanic, and a teenage grandson, Steven. They lived in West Memphis, the third poorest zip code in the whole US.

The homeless Mike was taken in “temporarily” by Big Tony but never left. When Betty Boo was on her death bed, she asked as a dying wish that Big Tony would send Steven to a Christian school. “Tony decided that as long as he was taking Steven out on this search for a Christian education, he should take Big Mike, too.”<sup>87</sup> Mike was admitted<sup>88</sup> to the exclusive and

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<sup>84</sup> God’s love and holiness will be discussed in further detail in the section for Christian theists using Scriptures.

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/24/magazine/24football.html>

<sup>86</sup> Michael Lewis, *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game*, 46.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>88</sup> Steven was also admitted to Briarcrest. *Ibid.*, 51.

expensive Briarcrest Christian School by the intervention of the football coach, “a man [sic] of God.”<sup>89</sup>

Sean left Ole Miss with his fiancée Leigh Anne “and a new religion. But he left without a penny. Now, by the fall of 2002, he’d become, by just about every way they measured it in Memphis, a success. He’d been Born Again and helped to create one of the fastest growing evangelical churches in Memphis.”<sup>90</sup> His son and daughter attended Briarcrest and told him about the new kid, Big Mike. Sean and Leigh Anne allowed Mike to stay with them and eventually adopted him. “Michael got saved when he was at Briarcrest . . . What better way to spread the word of Jesus than for Michael Oher to stand up and say it?”<sup>91</sup>

Though offered football scholarships at many elite programs, Michael chose to play for Ole Miss, the alma mater of his adoptive parents Sean and Leigh Anne Touhy. He graduated with a degree in criminal justice and joined the Baltimore Ravens in 2009. He won his Super Bowl ring after the Ravens defeated San Francisco in Super Bowl XLVII. He subsequently played for the Tennessee Titans and the Carolina Panthers. His life story was made into a movie, *The Blind Side*, starring Sandra Bullock who won the Oscar Award for Best Actress.

Is it ever too late for humans to turn to God? Is any situation so dire or so hopeless that God would throw up his hands and give up on his creatures? Is anything too difficult for God? Help for Michael Oher as well as for “Sue” and her family is available *if* they are willing to *acknowledge God’s existence* rather than claiming that God is a figment of their imagination. If they return to their creator, the holy God, in love, will forgive his creatures and help them escape

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 318.

from their seemingly “hopeless” conditions. However, if they insist on doing things their way (e.g., drinking, drugs, live-in boyfriends), they cannot blame their misfortunes (e.g., Sue’s rape and murder) on God and deny his goodness or existence, as suggested by Rowe.

#### **4.6 The Case of “The Brothers Karamazov.”**

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky, the famous Russian novelist, related a tense scene between the two siblings. Ivan Karamazov, a university professor, challenged his brother, Alyosha, a novice clergyman, on the excruciating problem of evil.

*“Tell me frankly, I appeal to you-- answer me: imagine that it is you yourself who are erecting the edifice of human destiny with the aim of making men [sic] happy in the end, of giving them peace and contentment at last, but that to do that it is absolutely necessary, and indeed quite inevitable, to torture to death only one tiny creature, the little girl who beat her breast with her little fist, and to found the edifice on her unavenged tears—would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me and do not lie!” “No, I wouldn’t consent,” said Alyosha softly.”<sup>92</sup>*

In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God is *not* “erecting the edifice of human destiny with the aim of making men [sic] happy in the end” on the little girl’s “unavenged tears.”<sup>93</sup> Humans are on the path of rebellion<sup>94</sup> against their creator, refusing to acknowledge God’s existence and

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<sup>92</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book 5, Chapter 4.

<sup>93</sup> Dr. Evan Fales said: “For me, Alyosha’s answer is moral bedrock. Any theodicy that answers ‘yes’ to Ivan’s questions is unworthy of serious consideration.” Evan Fales, “Theodicy in a Vale of Tears,” 349.

<sup>94</sup> God gave humans two paths to choose from: the path of obedience (life) and the path of disobedience (rebellion and death). Most men and women choose not to believe in the existence of the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent Judeo-Christian God. See Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*.

insisting on fulfilling their own will and desires. Contrary to Moltmann's "Theology of Hope,"<sup>95</sup> and Schleiermacher's universalism,<sup>96</sup> there may be *no* ultimate aim on God's part to give the rebels (if they persist in their insurrection) "peace and contentment at last." The torture and death of the one little girl (and many others like her) are strictly humans' evil doings as they blithely ignore the moral precept "Do not murder."<sup>97</sup> God does not "condone," "permit," "decree," "foreknow but allow," or "actualize" such a heinous act (even for the sake of any "ultimate good")! Like the novice clergyman Alyosha, God *never* consents to the torture and murder of even one of his creatures.

Why then does God not intervene to prevent these horrendous evils? In the parable of the Prodigal Son,<sup>98</sup> the younger son demanded his inheritance money (while his father was still alive)<sup>99</sup> and decided to separate himself from his father. He went to "a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living . . . he began to be in need. And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into the fields to feed swine,"<sup>100</sup> a shameful task for a good Jewish boy!<sup>101</sup> Let us say that the son stubbornly persisted in his estrangement with his father, chose to stay with his master, and married one of his master's

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<sup>95</sup> Dr. Moltmann wrote: "God promises a new creation of all things in righteousness and peace." Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 23. He further said: "My conclusion is—to a universalism of hope which is not a doctrine or a certainty but is a presupposition." Jürgen Moltmann, "Talk-back Session with Jürgen Moltmann," 41.

<sup>96</sup> Schleiermacher averred: "We surely ought, at the very least, to grant equal right to that more moderate outlook of which there are also still some traces in Scripture, namely that by the power of redemption a general restoration of all human souls would eventually occur." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, 998.

<sup>97</sup> Robert Young, "What Is so Wrong with Killing People?" 515–28. For theists, the command appears in the Decalogue. "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

<sup>98</sup> Since this is a section for non-theists, we are only using this well-known parable as a story. If one is so inclined, one can substitute this tale with another "tough-love" account from parents with drug-addicted offspring.

<sup>99</sup> "This request means *he wants his father to die!*' The universality of this ingrained concept strongly suggests that the attitude is of great antiquity." Kenneth Bailey. *The Cross & the Prodigal*, 41.

<sup>100</sup> Luke 15:11–32.

<sup>101</sup> "The intensity of this climax could only be duly felt by Jews, who had such a loathing and abhorrence for swine that they would not even *name* them, but spoke of a pig as *dabhar acheer*, 'the other thing.'" *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/15-15.htm>

female slaves. In time, they were blessed with a little girl whom they dearly loved. However, since he and his wife were both servants/slaves of the master, the child who was born to them also belonged to their foreign master<sup>102</sup> who treated them shabbily (i.e., “he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him”).<sup>103</sup> One day, the wicked master decided to torture, rape, and kill the little girl. Should the Prodigal Son who steadfastly refused to acknowledge his father’s existence (or claimed that his father was dead) expect that his (non-existent) father would somehow appear and rescue the little girl?<sup>104</sup> Was God to blame for the horrendous evils committed against the innocent child? What responsibilities should the Prodigal Son and his evil master shoulder for the dastardly deeds?

Fortunately, that was not how the parable of the Prodigal Son ended. After much evil, pain, and suffering (the father’s “tough-love” approach),<sup>105</sup> the son finally “came to his senses,” went back home and reconciled with his father. Forgiveness and full restoration of relationship were immediately bestowed. “Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand<sup>106</sup> and sandals on his feet, and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.”<sup>107</sup>

The choice of outcome was up to the Prodigal Son. He could persist in his rebellion, live

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<sup>102</sup> “This was on the basis of the rabbinic exegesis of Ex.21:4, where the Law prescribes: ‘If his master gives him [the Jewish slave] a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s.’” Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 315.

<sup>103</sup> Luke 15:16.

<sup>104</sup> Would the sudden miraculous appearance of (a non-existent) God not be an undue “coercion” to believe in his existence? “If God is directly present to me in all his power, glory, and love, my intellect compels my assent to the proposition that he exists; there is no room for free assent.” William Rowe, “Paradox and Promise: Hick’s Solution to the Problem of Evil,” 115.

<sup>105</sup> The father also carries his own burden of pain and suffering as all parents of drug-addicted children well know.

<sup>106</sup> “The ring is an emblem of wealth, position, honour; that is one signification of this gift to the penitent. Still further, it is an ornament to the hand on which it glistens; that is another. It is a sign of delegated authority and of representative character; as when Joseph was exalted to be the second man in Egypt, and Pharaoh’s signet ring was plucked off and placed upon his finger.” *MacLaren’s Expositions*. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/15-22.htm>

<sup>107</sup> Luke 15:22–24.

with the consequences, and own up to his responsibilities (e.g., the torture, rape, and death of his daughter) without blaming his (considered dead or non-existent) father. Or he could decide to go home, acknowledge his father's existence and heal their relationship. The father, in "tough love," did not enable his son to live a degenerate life, nor did he bail him out of his trouble. He patiently waited, in love and long-suffering, for his son to return willingly, without any coercion or recrimination. Was there a possibility that the son might never return? Sadly, yes. However, did the loving father have any other (non-coercing) alternative in the face of the Prodigal Son's stubborn resistance? Commenting on the astounding (and countercultural) picture of God painted by Jesus to his Middle Eastern audience, Dr. Kenneth Bailey observed: "Jesus has not taken an oriental patriarch as a model for God. Rather he breaks all the bounds of patriarchal culture to present this matchless picture of a father who alone should shape our image of God as our heavenly father."<sup>108</sup> Dr. John Martin added: "He (the father) had been waiting for his son to return, for while he was still a long way off, the father saw him."<sup>109</sup> God's love and compassion for his creatures (even for one little girl or boy) compel him to patiently watch and wait for the blessed day when they acknowledge his existence and return to him!

#### **4.7 Conclusion.**

In the "Tough-love Proposal," God reluctantly gives rebellious humans the freedom to be independent and must therefore live with their evil actions. As it is supported by evidence from various fields of knowledge as well as being "commonsensical," the theory appears to be a *reasonable answer* to the "Evidential Problem of Evil" as presented by Dr. Rowe (i.e., sub-

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<sup>108</sup> Kenneth Bailey. *The Cross & the Prodigal*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> John Martin, "Luke," 245.

objective # 4 of the research project, page 8). Thus, contrary to Rowe's Theological Premise, God does *not* necessarily prevent all evils, whether moral, natural, gratuitous, excessive . . . In "tough love," God patiently works through his Church and longingly waits for his creatures to return into fellowship with him. In the next chapter, we will address the fifth research objective, whether the "Tough-love Proposal" meets some other requirements raised by various philosophers and theologians.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REQUIREMENTS FOR A THEODICY

#### 5.1 Introduction

Various requirements for a theodicy have been suggested in the literature. Due to space constraints, only some of the most prominent ones will be addressed. We will subject the “Tough-love Proposal” to these tests to ascertain its strengths.

As this is a section for non-theists, we will not use any Scripture (the Bible) to support our points. We will accept the bounds of scientific knowledge as well as the rules of logic and the tenets of common sense. Our aim in this chapter is to determine whether the “Tough-love Proposal” meets the requirements for a theodicy by various scholars.

#### 5.2 The Requirements.

##### *5.2.1 The “Logical Consistency” Requirement.*

Dr. John Feinberg listed several requirements for a theodicy. The first is the “logical consistency” criterion. “The theodicy’s task is to structure an answer that demonstrates that these propositions taken together are logically consistent.”<sup>1</sup>

The propositions of the “Tough-love Proposal’ are:

(1) God, if he exists, disapproves of humans claiming that God does not exist.

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<sup>1</sup> John Feinberg, “Theodicy,” 1184.



(2) In his disapproval, God lets humans go their own way (resulting in good and evil from their free will) and in love, patiently waits for them to return, an approach popularly known as “tough-love.”

(3) In his disapproval, God may not intervene in humans’ environment to prevent natural evils.

(4) God and evil can exist together.

Another form of the argument can be as follows:

(1’) If God exists, God disapproves of humans claiming that God does not exist.

(2’) If God disapproves of humans claiming that God does not exist, God does not *necessarily* intervene to prevent all evils (a “tough-love” approach).

(3’) If God does not *necessarily* intervene to prevent all evils, there are evils (moral, natural, gratuitous . . .).

(4’) Therefore, if God exists, there are evils (moral, natural, gratuitous . . .).

The “tough-love” deductive argument is *logically consistent* and valid (a hypothetical syllogism in classical logic).<sup>2</sup>

### 5.2.2 The “Relevancy to the Problem” Requirement.

According to Feinberg, “a successful theodicy must be relevant to the problem of evil it addresses.”<sup>3</sup> He argued that the problem of evil is multifaceted. “Some problems arise in a

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<sup>2</sup> The “Tough-love Proposal” advocates a libertarian free will. The logical consistency between libertarian free will and God’s omniscience/sovereignty has been discussed. See Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*.

<sup>3</sup> John Feinberg, “Theodicy,” 1184.

logical form and others in an evidential form. Moreover, there are problems of moral evil and natural evil, problems about the quantity of evil, problems about the intensity of evil, and problems about the apparent gratuitousness of much evil.”<sup>4</sup>

The “Tough-love Proposal” answers the problem of moral evil by maintaining that people freely commit moral evils and must bear full responsibility for their actions since they insist on complete independence from God. Natural evils occur as a result of natural laws and/or human actions without God’s interference (e.g., houses built on flood plains). Social evils (e.g., maldistribution of wealth resulting in poverty) happen by the collective action of humans bent on their individual pursuit of happiness. Numerous, excessive, intense, horrendous, and prolonged evils (e.g., the Holocaust) are caused by a person or a group of people intent on fulfilling a desired goal (e.g., “ethnic cleansing”). Seemingly “gratuitous”<sup>5</sup> evils (e.g., child abuses, gang rapes) ensue from humans’ immoral and senseless actions, unrestrained by human or divine norms of behavior. The logical problem of evil is solved by the logically possible scenario of God existing with evils resulting from libertarian free will.<sup>6</sup> The evidential problem of evil is resolved by the denial of Rowe’s Theological Premise that God would prevent *all* gratuitous evils. In “tough-love,” God reluctantly allows people to go their own way and cause much evil (gratuitous or otherwise) on this earth.

The problem of divine hiddenness (i.e., God hides himself) is addressed by advocating that God, in his disapproval of humans’ denial of his existence, grants them their wish to live independently of their creator, unencumbered by God’s moral precepts and presence. Thus, God

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<sup>4</sup> John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 285.

<sup>5</sup> The “Tough-love proposal” can accommodate both gratuitous and non-gratuitous evils. Thus, it is not necessary to determine whether an evil is gratuitous or not (an exceedingly difficult task).

<sup>6</sup> The problem of God’s sovereignty/foreknowledge and human free will has been addressed in Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*.

appears to be dead, absent, hidden, and uninvolved to the non-theist who so believes. However, to the theist in the exact same circumstances (e.g., mass shootings), God appears to be present and is a source of comfort and love.<sup>7</sup> Each person is thus strengthened in his/her own belief and conviction, being uncoerced in his/her decisions to acknowledge or deny the existence of the creator.

### *5.2.3 The “Relevancy to the Theology” Requirement.*

Feinberg states, “A theodicy must be relevant to the specific theology it addresses, and not all theologies, even within the sphere of orthodox Christian theism, hold identical positions concerning God and evil.”<sup>8</sup>

The “Tough-love Proposal” seeks to provide a reasonable answer for the problem of evil to non-theists as well as theists. Thus, it limits itself to the “bare bones” of Restricted Standard Theism (i.e., God as an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator without other independent religious claims) to accommodate a wide audience with various beliefs. Premises and data that may not be commonly accepted are not used to support the proposal (e.g., the existence of Satan and demons, the Bible).

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<sup>7</sup> Kate Shellnut, “After Mass Shootings, Americans Turn to Four Bible Verses Most.” <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/october/after-mass-shootings-top-bible-verses-psalm-34-18-las-vegas.html>

<sup>8</sup> John Feinberg, “Theodicy,” 1184.

“Tough-love” is a morally intuitive concept that transcends many theologies (Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu)<sup>9</sup> and cultures (Eastern, Western, African)<sup>10</sup> and can thus be readily accepted by people of various religious and non-religious backgrounds.<sup>11</sup>

#### 5.2.4 The “Value Claim” Requirement.

Dr. Daniel Speak stated that “a theodicy must offer plausible support for two claims,”<sup>12</sup> the “Value Claim” and the “Impossibility Claim.” He defines the “Value Claim” as, “a world containing these (or comparable) goods and these (or comparable) evils is better than any world containing neither”<sup>13</sup> and “that the target goods really are so valuable as to justify the existence of horrible evils”<sup>14</sup> in a God-created world.

The “Tough-love Proposal” obviates the need to “weigh” all the goods of the world against all its evils and come up with a positive balance (i.e., “goods” minus “evils” must be greater than zero). Such a difficult task is wrought with uncertainty and subject to much disagreement. For example, Plantinga’s “Free Will Defense” had to contend with the criticism that “free will” is not worth the price of the horrendous evils in the world. Peter van Inwagen

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<sup>9</sup> Catholicism (“Tough Love,” <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7082>); Protestantism (“Loving Your Prodigal,” <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/parenting-challenges/teen-rebellion/loving-your-prodigal>); Buddhism (“Tough Love,” <https://www.tibetanbuddhistaltar.org/tough-love/>); Islam (“Tough Love,” <http://www.straightpathforecovery.com/>); Hinduism (“Tough Love,” <http://indianthoughts.in/tough-love-2/>).

<sup>10</sup> Western culture (“Tough Love,” <https://www.todaychristianwoman.com/articles/2003/may/2.42.html>); Eastern culture (“It’s time for Hong Kong parents to show their offspring some tough love,” [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2017-11/13/content\\_34464387.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2017-11/13/content_34464387.htm)); African culture (“What is the Nigerian Parenting Style?” <https://lagosmums.com/what-is-the-nigerian-parenting-style/>).

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Eleonore Stump observed: “The wider worldview within which a claim is embedded matters to the evaluation of the claim. Plausibility is relative to a worldview.” Eleonore Stump, “Response to Trakakis,” 109. “Tough love” is compatible with various worldviews and is thus very plausible.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 96.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Speak, “Free Will and Soul-Making Theodicies,” 205–206.

argued: “The existence of free will may be worth some evil, but it certainly isn’t worth the amount we actually observe.”<sup>15</sup> Hick’s “Soul-making” theodicy claims that evils are necessary to build character traits like courage, compassion, cooperation, and perseverance. Were the horrendous evils of Hurricane Katrina required for such soul-making? Did the benefits outweigh the costs of untold pains and sufferings? Was there any “cheaper” way to accomplish the same goals? Dr. Stanley Kane opined: “It is hard to see why people cannot learn just as much of the spirit of help and cooperation by teaming together to win an athletic championship as by coming together to rescue a town leveled by a tornado or inundated by a flood.”<sup>16</sup> Swinburne’s theodicy was also subject to the “value claim” criticism by Dr. Paul Draper. “Swinburne makes a host of substantial and highly controversial axiological claims . . . One such claim is that free will is very valuable in itself—that is, very valuable for the agent regardless of how that agent uses it. This is one reason why Swinburne makes no attempt to prove that the morally good free actions in the world outweigh the morally bad free actions.”<sup>17</sup>

In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God lets humans go their own way as they refuse to acknowledge God’s existence. The goods or evils that happen on earth are their doings as God may choose not to interfere with their schemes. The world and its “value” are whatever they make of them by their own actions. Contrary to Rowe’s claim, the lack of value (if it so appears after human accounting) cannot be blamed on God and used as a reason to deny his goodness or existence.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, 84.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley Kane, “The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy,” 3.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Draper, “Review: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* by Richard Swinburne,” 461.

<sup>18</sup> William Rowe claimed in his Principle B: “If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it.” William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* 112. However, if the world’s “value” is whatever independent-minded humans make of it, then they could hardly blame the poor results on God, demand a “better world,” or use the state of a “less-than-good” world to deny God’s goodness and existence.

Do humans want to have less evil and more good in their universe? They will simply need to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and work toward that goal for God (in human thinking) is either absent, dead, or non-existent, a pure figment of one's imagination. There is no other world but this one (i.e., no afterlife) and wishing for the stars (i.e., a different world) will not make this one any better. Therefore, one should "eat, drink, and be merry" for tomorrow one shall die in a world of one's own making without God.

What would be the alternative (e.g., a world where the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God reigns supreme as the Lord and Creator)? Do humans really want to have someone rule over them, tell them what to do, and make them love their God and their neighbors? Is there any "value" to this "love"?<sup>19</sup> Are they willing to bow and acknowledge that God's will supersedes their desires and must be accomplished "on earth as it is in heaven"? Would they agree to give up control of their lives and trust in an invisible God? Would they prefer a world where God is sovereign to the actual world with its good and evil but where *humans are sovereign* over all creatures?<sup>20</sup> Which world would they declare to have a "higher value"?

Is there a third choice, a world where people can live as they please without God's interference *except* that God can be (occasionally) summoned to help them in their distress (e.g., cancer, earthquake, protection from mass shootings . . .) and God can be *blamed* when he does not comply with their demands? In this world, as God is fair and loves everyone equally, 323

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<sup>19</sup> "A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other." C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 52. "Richard Bach says: 'If you love something, set it free. If it comes back, it's yours. If not, it was never meant to be.'" Jonathan Munn, *Whom Seek Ye?* 42. Thus, only true lovers of God would be welcome to this world (e.g., heaven).

<sup>20</sup> If one prefers a world where God is sovereign, one is moving from the non-theist camp to the theist circle.

million Americans will be sharing the Powerball winning number *every lottery drawing*. Every football team will be in the Super Bowl. All the Olympic athletes will get the gold medals. All Americans will have the title of POTUS (President of the United States).<sup>21</sup> In this utopia (with no or very little evil), no one will ever die from drug overdoses, diseases, old age, hurricanes, or earthquakes, thus causing the world population to skyrocket and outstrip the available resources with predictable disasters. In this situation, we are confident that humans can come up with various schemes to tell God how to run the universe in the most beneficial manner for them (or certain groups of them, e.g., give the earth's dwindling resources to the USA instead of some other countries). In this world, God is no longer God but is reduced to the status of Santa Claus, humans' slave serving at their beck and call.

Unfortunately, we strongly doubt that the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God, creator of the universe (if he exists), would agree to such a deal. Would humans consent to such an arrangement, serve God at his pleasure and do his will? As only one person can be in charge as in the saying "The buck stops here,"<sup>22</sup> only one can be in the driver's seat of humans' lives, either they or God, not both. We can daydream wistfully about better worlds with more goods and less evils (i.e., more "value" for people), where we can be the masters of our lives with God's eager help and service, and where God does not ask for our love, loyalty, and complete devotion.<sup>23</sup> Sadly, although we would like to have our cake and eat it too, this option of humans being the bosses and God the employee is unfortunately not available!

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<sup>21</sup> This is a slight exaggeration as only a native-born citizen can be president.

<sup>22</sup> "The sign 'The Buck Stops Here' that was on President Truman's desk in his White House office was made in the Federal Reformatory at El Reno, Oklahoma." <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/buckstop.htm>

<sup>23</sup> "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment" (Matthew 22:37–38).

Thus, they have a choice between acknowledging God as Lord of their lives, or themselves as gods of their existence. They can choose between the two options, a Me-in-charge world or a God-in-charge world. What shall it be?

He was born in the prohibition era to a conservative Methodist<sup>24</sup> family, a descendant of Plymouth governor William Bradford.<sup>25</sup> His devout mother wanted him to be a missionary.<sup>26</sup> He decided instead to join the Army and subsequently graduated with a degree in Psychology and a minor in Creative Writing. He first worked as a copywriter for Esquire but then decided to start his own magazine with money from various sources, including 1000 dollars from his mother, “not because she believed in the venture . . . but because she believed in her son.”<sup>27</sup> His biggest asset at the time was a nude photograph of Marilyn Monroe which he had bought the rights for 500 dollars. “When Playboy reached newsstands in December 1953, its press run of 51,000 sold out. The publisher, instantly famous, would soon become a millionaire; after five years, the magazine’s annual profit was \$4 million, and its rabbit-head logo was recognized around the world.”<sup>28</sup>

Hugh Hefner left his wife and children and indulged in his physical appetites, living in the Playboy Mansion and claiming that “he had slept with over 1000 women.”<sup>29</sup> He was involved in politics (e.g., support for same sex marriage) and philanthropy (USC School of Cinematic Arts). He famously said, “If a man [sic] has a right to find God in his own way, he has a right to

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<sup>24</sup> <https://jezebel.com/5594680/hugh-hefner-on-his-role-in-fighting-segregation>

<sup>25</sup> <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1112823,00.html>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.economist.com/news/obituary/21729969-founder-playboy-empire-was-91-hugh-hefner-died-september-27th>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.salisbury.edu/careerservices/students/Presentations/FamousMajors/Default.html>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/obituaries/hugh-hefner-dead.html>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



go to the Devil in his own way also,” and “Life is too short to be living somebody else's dream.”<sup>30</sup> He died in 2017 at the age of 91.

Francis was raised on a small farm and homeschooled until the sixth grade. He studied at the University of Virginia and received a PhD from Yale in Physical Chemistry. After going to medical school at UNC (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), he returned to Yale as a fellow in human genetics. He subsequently oversaw the International Human Genome Sequencing Consortium tasked with the Human Genome Project which was successfully completed in 2003. In 2009, Dr. Francis Collins was named the director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He was an atheist but later became a Christian at the age of 27. He said concerning his conversion: “I was an atheist, finding no reason to postulate the existence of any truths outside of mathematics, physics and chemistry. But then I went to medical school, and encountered life and death issues at the bedsides of my patients . . . I had always assumed that faith was based on purely emotional and irrational arguments, and was astounded to discover, initially in the writings of the Oxford scholar C. S. Lewis and subsequently from many other sources, that one could build a very strong case for the plausibility of the existence of God on purely rational grounds. My earlier atheist's assertion that ‘I know there is no God’ emerged as the least defensible.”<sup>31</sup>

Which world has the higher “value”? A Hugh Hefner’s Me-in-charge hedonistic paradise or a Francis Collins’s God-in-charge realm?

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ajc.com/news/national/funny-iconic-hugh-hefner-quotes-remember-the-playboy-legend/cNJNtMu3cdZhAsOca1y9xH/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/04/03/collins.commentary/index.html>

Concerning Dr. Speak's "Value Claim," the "Tough-love Proposal" avoids the predicament of having to weigh the values of the goods (e.g., free will, soul-making . . .) against the disvalues<sup>32</sup> of the evils (e.g., "Bambi" E1 and "Sue" E2), an almost impossible task fraught with uncertainty and controversy. Instead, "Tough-love" affirms that the world and its "value" are whatever humans make of them if they declare their independence from God. In this proposal, they can freely choose to deny God's existence and run their lives as they see fit (i.e., a Me-in-charge scenario) or they can opt to acknowledge God's existence and sovereignty and let God be the Lord of their situations (i.e., a God-in-charge arrangement). Like Hugh Hefner and Francis Collins, we are free to decide without God's interference. Whichever path we take, we will have to live with the consequences, whether good (i.e., positive value) or evil (i.e., negative value).

#### 5.2.5 *The "Impossibility Claim" Requirement.*

According to Dr. Speak, besides the requirement to uphold a "Value Claim," a theodicy must also "offer plausible support" for the "Impossibility Claim," that "it was impossible for

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<sup>32</sup> Axiological concepts focus on the "goodness or badness, the desirability or undesirability, of state of affairs . . . an action that fails to maximize the balance of good state of affairs over bad states of affairs is morally wrong." Deontological concepts "focus upon the rightness and wrongness of actions . . . determine whether an action is one that ought to be performed or ought not to be performed." Michael Tooley, "The Problem of Evil." The "Tough-love Proposal" answers the axiological issue by advocating that the balance of good versus bad states of affairs is humans' responsibility as they have chosen to deny God's existence and refuse his help. Concerning the deontological question whether God is morally culpable for allowing horrendous evils like the Holocaust, the "Tough-love Proposal" maintains that humans are the responsible parties since they insist on exercising their free will independently of God and rejecting any outside interference. In his disapproval of humans' decision to ignore his existence, God may not intervene either to bring a better balance of good over evil or to prevent horrendous evils in the world. God is not morally culpable for human actions, especially since they ignore his advice and counsel, leaving him no other choice (short of outright coercion) but to persevere in a "tough-love" approach in addition to his other efforts (e.g., evangelistic rallies, TV religious programs, the steadfast work of the Holy Spirit . . .).

God to secure a world containing these (or comparable) goods without it also containing these (or comparable) evils.”<sup>33</sup>

In the “Tough-love Proposal,” it is *logically impossible* for God to give humans free will not to acknowledge his existence and at the same time insist that they believe in him (or obeys his commands, e.g., “you shall not kill”). Dr. Plantinga asserted: “To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so.”<sup>34</sup> Dr. Swinburne concurred: “The most obvious example of this logical straitjacket to which even God is subject is that he cannot give us very serious free will, i.e. the free will to choose between good and wrong, without the natural possibility (unprevented by God) that we will do wrong.”<sup>35</sup>

As humans stubbornly refuse to acknowledge God's existence despite his numerous efforts, God was left with no other alternative (short of coercion) but to apply “tough-love.” Thus, the world with its goods and evils is fully the result of human actions without God's interference. God may choose not to meddle in human affairs *unless* he is asked by the people who believe in his existence and power. Even then, he takes pains to hide his actions,<sup>36</sup> making them appear as mere “coincidences,” in order to preserve human freedom to decide without any coercion on God's part.

He came to the US as a 17-year-old foreign student and became a refugee when South Vietnam fell to the communists in 1975. His father died in the debacle, leaving him an orphan without a country as he had already lost his mom to suicide when he was 8. That Christmas in

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 96.

<sup>34</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 127.

<sup>36</sup> “Truly, You are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, Savior” (Isaiah 45:15).

Texas, in the deserted dormitory, he desperately cried out to Buddha for help, but his forlorn pleas went unanswered!

Looking out of his window from the high-rise dorm, he contemplated the deep snow and wondered if that would muffle the sound of his fall. In that moment of truth, he finally understood what his mother did long ago, for a time comes when life is a living hell, mere existence is an excruciating torture, and the future apocalypse is now!

An American friend saw him alone in the dorm and invited him home for Christmas. Hearing about this Jesus who offers love and protection to his people, the kid decided to change religion as Buddha had done nothing to alleviate his sufferings.

Thanks to an assistantship, he earned a master's degree and applied to various PhD programs. Wonder of wonders, he was accepted at MIT, with a full scholarship! However, of what use would be a PhD in microbiology in Vietnam where research was non-existent? Would he dare hope that his new God would secure him a spot in medical school? Should he put Jesus to a "test"?

Summoning his training, he decided to apply science to religion: set up an experiment that would unequivocally rule out a pure coincidence, leaving the only alternative as the work of God. The disadvantage of such an attempt was that, if God did not exist (or if he refused to participate), the consequence of a failure might be painful for the experimenter. Nevertheless, he realized that he could not live in a perpetual uncertainty for he was expending significant time and effort at church, all of which would be wasted if the God of the Bible only existed as a figment of one's (evolutionary) imagination!

So, he told God what he was about to do. He would turn down MIT's offer and would apply to medical school. The crux of the experiment was that his chance of acceptance to medical school was zilch! He was a "refugee" without any legal status. He had no money and no family that could use "connections" to push his application. He would have to compete with native English speakers for the few scarce slots in medical school.

He applied to Harvard, Yale, and all the schools in Texas. Soon after, the rejection letters came quickly from the out of state schools. Furthermore, the Texas schools advised him that they reserved all their slots for Texas residents only. This turn of events forced him to "help God out" by endeavoring to get the all-important "green card" (permanent residency).

His first step was to contact the overworked immigration office. After a long wait in a sweltering room packed with applicants, he was finally accorded five minutes with the immigration officer. The bored bureaucrat barely listened and summarily dismissed the kid with the comment that "nothing could be done." In truth, the refugee did not expect much from this meeting. He just wanted to be able to say to God (if he exists) that he did his part and that he *expected God to do his*.

In the same spirit, he contacted the office of the congressman for help. However, upon hearing that he could not vote, the secretary said that she would "relay the message."

A friend suggested joining the National Guard to get American citizenship. Of course, the kid was thrilled and immediately called the recruiting officer. However, they were soon at cross purposes since the recruiter needed the kid's "green card" before he could sign him up and the refugee wanted to sign up in order to get a "green card." They soon realized that the situation

was a “catch 22”<sup>37</sup> and that it was useless to persist in such a foolish endeavor! This “perfect storm” of problems was way over anyone’s capacity to solve. Of course, the kid already knew that his chances were next to nothing. However, *it still hurt to be right!*

Unbeknownst to him, a bill had been working its way through congress, passing the House on September 27, 1977, approved by the Senate on October 10, and signed by President Jimmy Carter on October 28. It was called “an act to authorize the creation of a record of admission for permanent residence in the cases of certain refugees from Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia.”<sup>38</sup> With no time to spare, he quickly informed the Texas medical schools of his new status of “Texas resident” and was subsequently accepted into several institutions!

Coincidence or the hand of the Omnigod? You be the judge! If all these events were due to mere chance, I am very glad that they always fell my way! I believe that the experiment demonstrates “beyond a reasonable doubt”<sup>39</sup> that God exists and is the omnipotent and omnibenevolent creator of the universe, capable of influencing both the House and the Senate of the US congress as well as the President of the United States (all within the time frame of merely three months) for the sake of *one* of his followers.

In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God endeavors to exercise “divine hiddenness” (to avoid undue coercion on non-theists) when he intervenes on behalf of those who acknowledge his existence and ask for his help. Such interventions are cloaked under the mantle of “coincidences,” allowing people complete freedom to interpret the facts as they see fit. The French theologian François Fénelon observed: “God works in a mysterious way in grace as well

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<sup>37</sup> “A dilemma or difficult circumstance from which there is no escape because of mutually conflicting or dependent conditions.” <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/catch-22>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-91/pdf/STATUTE-91-Pg1223.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> The legal criterion for a criminal conviction in the USA.

as in nature, concealing his operations under an imperceptible succession of events, and thus keeps us always in the darkness of faith. He not only accomplishes his designs gradually, but by means that seem the most simple, and the most competent to the end, in order that human wisdom may attribute the success to the means, and thus his own working be less manifest; otherwise every act of God would seem to be a miracle, and the state of faith, wherein it is the will of God that we should live, would come to an end.”<sup>40</sup>

Humans are free to act in faith and believe in God or they can persist in their “declaration of independence” from their creator. The “Tough-love Proposal” satisfies Dr. Speak’s “impossibility claim” by advocating that it is *logically impossible* for God to give humans free will to decide about God’s existence (and to commit evil) and at the same time ensure that they acknowledge God’s reality (and always do what is good). People have complete freedom to make their choices independently of God and live with the goods and evils they bring about in this world!

#### 5.2.6 The “Commonsensical Views About the World” Requirement.

Dr. Nick Trakakis suggested three requirements for a plausible theodicy, the first being “commonsensical views about the world.”<sup>41</sup>

The “Tough-love Proposal” is derived from a familiar and “common sense” approach to the problem of recalcitrant offspring trapped in addiction. Is “tough-love” the right (or best) solution? There are differences of opinion in the matter. However, in many cases, there may not

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<sup>40</sup> François Fénelon, *Spiritual Progress*, 70

<sup>41</sup> Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil.”

be an alternative option if the progeny insists on going his/her own way despite all the advices and admonitions. Sadly, parents are not in control of their sons and daughters' destructive behaviors (especially if they are over 18), nor can they be held responsible for their children's lawless and evil actions. "The only thing you can do is try to offer support in any way you can, while remembering there's ultimately only one person who can help your loved one get better: the addict himself or herself. You didn't cause it, you can't control it, and you can't cure it."<sup>42</sup>

In the "tough-love" approach, God allows humans complete freedom to make up their minds about God's existence without any interference (e.g., enticement, bribes, threats, coercion . . .). "Tough-love" is also not used alone but in combination with other efforts to bring people back to God. As good parents do not give up on their wayward children and steadily assert their continued love for them, God does not give up on his creatures. He continues to affirm his steadfast love through churches, Christian organizations, Christian believers . . . As parents offer reconciliation and support, God also holds out the promise of complete forgiveness, a restored loving relationship, and abundant help to sort out one's troubles. What more can one ask of a "Father"? Thus, is it reasonable for a person with "commonsensical views about the world" to believe in God's existence?

Antony was the youngest of three brothers. His father was a banker and his mother a farmer's daughter. As a schoolboy, he "went to chapel every day and twice on Sundays, but he didn't feel every 'religious.'"<sup>43</sup> After a stint in the Royal Aircraft Establishment during WWII, he earned a PhD from Cambridge. "He successfully convinced the administration of the Cambridge University to allocate £20,000 to the creation of Interplanetary Scintillation Array (IPS Array)

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<sup>42</sup> Promises Treatment Centers, "Using Phrases Like 'Rock Bottom' Is Easy; Living With Them Is Hard," <https://www.promises.com/articles/addiction-intervention/using-phrases-like-rock-bottom-easy-living-hard/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://scienceandbelief.org/2013/02/07/antony-hewish-a-life-in-science-and-religion/>



which was installed at Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory in 1967 and originally covered 16,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Operating at 81.5 MHz, this radio telescope was one of the pioneering projects of its type at that time. The high-quality data of this radio telescope allowed Antony Hewish and his student Jocelyn Bell to discover the first pulsar.”<sup>44</sup> For their contribution to science, Antony Hewish and Martin Ryle received the 1974 Nobel Prize in Physics.

Concerning God, Sir Antony Hewish said: “While I have been a doubter all my life and still am, I do believe in God and believe in supporting the local parish church; having thought a lot about it I can't account for the world without God; to take the atheist view of Richard Dawkins<sup>45</sup> seems to me to be total nonsense; I have read his book carefully and his arguments fall flat as far as I am concerned.”<sup>46</sup> “It makes no sense to me to assume that the Universe and our existence is just a cosmic accident, that life emerged due to random physical processes in an environment which simply happened to have the right properties.”<sup>47</sup>

Everyone is free to use his/her intellect, power of reasoning, and “common sense” to make a decision about the existence of God. In the “Tough-love Proposal,” no one is coerced to believe or disbelieve. The scholars Richard Dawkins and Antony Hewish considered the same facts and came to different conclusions. Obviously, they cannot both be correct. Each sentient being is endowed by his/her creator with the unalienable right to decide freely and follow his/her own path.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.countercurrents.org/ziabari171012.htm>

<sup>45</sup> Richard Dawkins is a famous evolutionary biologist, an atheist, and the author of *The Selfish Gene* and *The God Delusion*.

<sup>46</sup> Antony Hewish, “Interview of Sir Antony Hewish.” (2008).  
<https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/197579>

<sup>47</sup> Antony Hewish, “Science and God,” 173.

<sup>48</sup> “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” US Declaration of Independence, 1776. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

### 5.2.7 The “Widely Accepted Scientific and Historical Views” Requirement.

Dr. Trakakis also required a theodicy to be consistent with “widely accepted scientific and historical views.”<sup>49</sup>

In deference to this principle, the “Tough-love Proposal” does not introduce controversial premises or questionable assumptions that are contradictory to science or history.<sup>50</sup> It endeavors to apply findings from other fields of knowledge to religion and philosophy.

“Tough-love” is widely used in many cultures, eastern<sup>51</sup> as well as western,<sup>52</sup> Catholic<sup>53</sup> as well as Protestant,<sup>54</sup> Jewish,<sup>55</sup> Buddhist,<sup>56</sup> Muslim,<sup>57</sup> and Hindu.<sup>58</sup> “Tough-love” seeks to instill discipline, submission to authority, and a sense of duty and responsibility for one’s actions. It also expresses disapproval for rebellion and disobedience. In response to repentance and contrition, it offers a complete, heartfelt forgiveness and a loving reconciliation.

“Tough-love” has been practiced in child rearing since antiquity. “At the age of 7, Spartan boys were removed from their parents’ homes and began the ‘agoge,’ a state-sponsored

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<sup>49</sup> Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil.”

<sup>50</sup> The “Tough-love Proposal” (for non-theists) also endeavors to avoid using any religious claims that may not be accepted by non-theists (e.g., the existence of Satan and demons). Dr. Peterson stated: “After many years of debate, we should learn the lesson that it is extremely difficult, and perhaps not all that enlightening, to conduct the debate within the confines of RST (Restricted Standard Theism: standard theism unaccompanied by other, independent religious claims). However, Rowe cautions that invoking some versions of EST (Extended Standard Theism: standard theism conjoined with certain other religious claims), say, drawn from Christian theology is actually counterproductive as a response to his argument.” Michael Peterson, “Christian Theism and the Evidential Argument from Evil,” 173.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.tbo.com/list/news-columns/does-chinese-tough-love-work-better-307982>

<sup>52</sup> <https://hbr.org/2013/12/the-fine-art-of-tough-love>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7082>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/tough-love-for-stubborn-church.html>

<sup>55</sup> <http://jewishstandard.timesofisrael.com/reeh-tough-love/>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.tibetanbuddhistaltar.org/tough-love/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://aifdemocracy.org/commentary-m-zuhdi-jasser-why-tough-love-is-best-answer-for-arab-world/>

<sup>58</sup> <http://indianthoughts.in/tough-love-2/>

training regimen designed to mold them into skilled warriors and moral citizens.”<sup>59</sup> All Spartan males were lifelong soldiers and fully expected to die for the state, if needs be. “Surrender was viewed as the epitome of cowardice . . . Only two classes of people could have their names inscribed on their tombstones: women who died in childbirth and men who fell in combat.”<sup>60</sup> “According to Plutarch, these ‘tough-love’ parenting techniques were so admired by foreigners that Spartan women were widely sought after for their skill as nurses and nannies.”<sup>61</sup> “Tough-love,” emphasizing discipline and responsibility, is thus well-accepted and admired in history.

The “tough-love” concept has been used in social work and social policy in the United Kingdom, in “the implementation of New Labour’s programme of reform of the welfare state.”<sup>62</sup> “‘Tough-love’ . . . conveys the key message that the reform of welfare systems is a moral enterprise that requires personal and emotional commitments by those engaged in its implementation.”<sup>63</sup> The program adopts “tough-love” as the “central principle, the idea of a welfare system which demands more of those who receive assistance —‘no rights without responsibilities’—and which in exchange improves their incentives and opportunities.”<sup>64</sup>

“Tough-love” is also applied in the field of economics, where companies are allowed to *directly compete* for foreign investment, with the “self-select” successful firms (i.e., suppliers of foreign corporations) having a higher capital-labor ratio, higher wages and a higher productivity level. “The results suggest that suppliers are different from non-suppliers in terms of productivity levels even after taking into account the self-selection of better performers into supplying MNCs

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<sup>59</sup> Evan Andrews. *8 Reasons It Wasn't Easy Being Spartan*. <http://www.history.com/news/history-lists/8-reasons-it-wasnt-easy-being-spartan>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Bill Jordan and Charlie Jordan, *Social Work and the Third Way: Tough-love as Social Policy*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 2.

(Multi-National Corporations). This observation is suggestive of suppliers learning from their interactions with multinational customers.”<sup>65</sup> Companies that take responsibility for their actions and make the correct “tough-love” changes to their business models survive and thrive. Those who do not suffer the consequences in the free market.

“Tough-love” has been advocated in the field of criminal justice. “While drug court provides offenders the chance to avoid imprisonment and permanent stigmatization by participating in the discourse of aid and treatment, ‘offenders’ in drug court also submit to a combination of penal and therapeutic aims.”<sup>66</sup> “Drug courts signal a move away from a ‘get tough’ retributive approach to criminal justice and toward a ‘tough-love,’ rehabilitation and treatment-oriented approach.”<sup>67</sup> Thus offenders have a choice between continuing on their destructive paths (and being held fully responsible for their misdeeds, i.e., imprisonment) or submitting to the judge who will “exercise enhanced supervision, monitoring and control over their lives.”<sup>68</sup>

“Tough-love” also appears in the field of altruism. “Charitable giving has increasingly become ‘tough-love’—it has come to require recipients to undertake costly prior action. A common justification is that of greater efficiency: willingness to undertake costly actions signals greater productivity from transfers.”<sup>69</sup> Potential recipients of charitable giving are thus given two choices: proceed independently without any help or accept the donation at the cost of surrendering some independence.

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<sup>65</sup> Beata Javorcik and Mariana Spatareanu, “Tough-love: Do Czech Suppliers Learn from their Relationships with Multinationals?” 811–33.

<sup>66</sup> Stacey Burns and Mark Peyrot, “Tough-love: Nurturing and Coercing Responsibility and Recovery in California Drug Courts,” 416–38.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Spiros Bougheas et al., “Tough-love or Unconditional Charity?” 561–82.

“Tough-love” is a concept used in organizational management and government. “One of the most-pervasive debates in literature on managing people is whether using ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ approaches produces better organizational performance—those seeking to influence behavior by pressuring or by nurturing . . . it appears that cultures characterized by ‘tough-love’ perform better than those with only ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ features by themselves.”<sup>70</sup> A mixture of “hard/tough” (e.g., accountability, responsibility, direction) and “soft/love” (e.g., consensus decision making, warm climate, acceptance) features used together in the “tough-love” approach fosters the best results.

“Tough love” is well-known in the field of psychology as it is often the bedrock of healthy relationships. “No one likes critical feedback. We often avoid criticism by discouraging those who give it or dismissing it as invalid. It’s hard to hear that someone feels mistrust, disappointment, or anger toward us. But avoiding ‘tough love’ denies us the opportunity to enhance respect and trust in our relationships and our lives.”<sup>71</sup> “Tough love” must be differentiated from “hostile domination” as “distinguishable forms of psychological control.”<sup>72</sup>

“Tough love” is also widely used in the field of education. “A positive alternative to detention and suspension, ‘Toughlove’ meetings held at schools help troubled teens learn personal accountability.”<sup>73</sup> “Tough love has fallen out of favor, and it can be a jolt especially for younger workers. But properly applied – with high expectations along with a sense of shared

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<sup>70</sup> Steven Kelman and Sounman Hong (2012). “Hard, Soft, or Tough-love: What Kinds of Organizational Culture Promote Successful Performance in Cross-Organizational Collaborations?” Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper Series, RWP12-005. John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

<sup>71</sup> Linda and Charlie Bloom, “Why Tough Love Can Be the Best Thing for Your Relationship.” <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/stronger-the-broken-places/201505/why-tough-love-can-be-the-best-thing-your-relationship>

<sup>72</sup> Joey Fung and Anna Lau, “Tough love or hostile domination? Psychological control and relational induction in cultural context,” 966–75.

<sup>73</sup> Rita Roberts, “Tough Love for Kids at Risk.” <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov93/vol51/num03/Toughlove-for-Kids-at-Risk.aspx>

vision and gratitude for a job well done — it is the highest vote of confidence anyone can offer.”<sup>74</sup>

Thus, “tough-love” is not a concept foreign to culture, science, education, or history. It has been widely used in various fields of human endeavors over the centuries. A combination of love and personal accountability appears to be an ideal mix in child rearing as well as in other societal endeavors. It is therefore not surprising that God would use the same approach with humans, balancing unconditional love with personal responsibility. People are free to either accept full liability for the evils on earth (without blaming God for his non-intervention) or come to God for help (thus surrendering their independence by acknowledging God’s existence and sovereignty). In the “Tough-love Proposal,” the choice is theirs and the responsibility for the outcome is theirs alone!

#### *5.2.8 The “Intuitively Plausible Moral Principles” Requirement.*

The third requirement mentioned by Dr. Trakakis was the need for “intuitively plausible moral principles (for example, generally, punishment should not be significantly disproportional to the offence committed).”<sup>75</sup>

“Tough-love” emphasizes *love*, a desire to help and to bring about a good resolution to the problem. In substance abuse situations, parental “tough-love” strives for the children’s freedom from drug addiction and a restoration of warm family relationships. No loving parent would deliberately wish evils on their wayward offspring. “Take the car, take the money, take

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<sup>74</sup> Joanne Lipman, “The Fine Art of Tough Love,” <https://hbr.org/2013/12/the-fine-art-of-tough-love>

<sup>75</sup> Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil.”

the phone, remove all privileges, and if that doesn't work, you may have to call the police on your child who is practicing illegal behaviors . . . Giving natural consequences a push in the right direction can go far in helping your child, while you're still there for emotional support as long as they are doing the right thing.”<sup>76</sup>

In education, the teacher's “tough-love” aims to help the students understand their responsibilities and recognize the dire consequences of their ill-considered actions. No loving teacher would want to see his/her students fail in school or even worse, in life.

In marriage, spousal “tough-love” endeavors to bring the partner back to his/her senses (e.g., a “tough-love” separation after a discovered affair) and return to a jointly avowed commitment.

In sports, using “tough-love,” the coach seeks to help his/her players to reach their full potential as athletes and well-rounded citizens in society. “Many of us that have played or coached this great sport (football) would have gladly thrown in the towel when things got tough, but those of us lucky enough to have someone administer some tough-love pushed through the situation and came out better humans because of it in the long run.”<sup>77</sup>

Likewise, God uses “tough-love” to bring his creatures to a recognition of his existence, an appreciation of his great love and benevolence as it is in their best interests to do so. After all, who knows better? The Creator or the creatures? Parents or children? Teachers or students?

Unfortunately, as we are well-aware, “tough-love” is not a magic formula; children may choose to persist in their destructive habits and die of drug overdose; students may refuse to take

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<sup>76</sup> <https://wholisticfitliving.com/what-is-tough-love-and-when-to-use-it>

<sup>77</sup> Doug Samuels, “Are we witnessing the end of the tough love coaching approach?” <http://footballscoop.com/news/are-we-witnessing-the-end-of-tough-love-coaching/>

responsibility for their education and fail out of school; spouses may insist on continuing their extramarital affairs and wreck their marriages; athletes may reject their coach's discipline and never reach their potential; God's creatures may disavow their creator and assert their independence. In these circumstances, can wayward children blame their parents for not preventing the drug overdoses? Can students blame their teachers for being illiterate? Can unfaithful spouses blame their mates for the acrimonious divorces? Can athletes blame their coaches for their poor performances? Can people blame God for the horrendous evils perpetrated in the world?

#### 5.2.9 Rowe's "Four Problems of Evil" Requirement.

Dr. William Rowe raised four distinct problems of evil that a theodicy must resolve. First, why would an omnipotent, perfectly good being (i.e., God) "permit any evil at all in our world?" Second, why would he "permit the various kinds of evil we find in our world" (e.g., murders, rapes)?" Third, why would he "permit the amount of evil (of these kinds) that we find in our world?" Finally, why would he permit some "particular evils" (e.g., the Holocaust) to occur in our world?<sup>78</sup>

The "Tough-love Proposal" addresses Rowe's four problems of evils by advocating that God (if he exists), in his disapproval of humans' denial of his existence, allows them and their environment to go their own way. They can thus commit as many moral and "attached"<sup>79</sup> natural

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<sup>78</sup> William Rowe, "Paradox and Promise: Hick's Solution to the Problem of Evil," 111–24. Rowe's "amount of evil," and "particular evils" correspond to Peter Van Inwagen's "global argument from evil," and "local argument from evil." Peter Van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Attached natural evils are evils that are partially due to human actions (e.g., the levee failures after Hurricane Katrina caused floods and deaths).



evils as their hearts desire.<sup>80</sup> The many evils, the various kinds of evil, the excessive amounts of evil of various kinds (gratuitous and otherwise) and the horrendous particular evils (e.g., the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia) are the results of people living independently from God and insisting on their own freedom to do whatever they please. Their environment is also allowed to proceed with its natural laws (without God's miraculous interventions) resulting in much natural evil (e.g., 2004 Indonesian tsunami with 200,000 deaths).

In love and with great patience, God still endeavors to call them to himself through many costly evangelistic efforts by the Church<sup>81</sup> and the parachurch organizations while allowing them complete freedom (without any coercion) to make up their own minds. Evils in the world are whatever they make of them. The kinds and amounts of evils are clearly horrendous and plentiful (and possibly gratuitous). However, who is to blame for such a calamitous situation? God or people?

Furthermore, Rowe wondered why "incredible amounts of pain and suffering fall equally on the innocent and the guilty . . . (whether saints or sinners)."<sup>82</sup> Several explanations can be given for such a situation. If saints (e.g., Christian believers) are spared by God from evil, pain, and suffering, this may be an unhealthy incentive (conversions for the sake of material blessings) on God's part to lure (non-theist) people back to him. After all, God desires people to love him for himself and not for the benefits he can provide. God also does not want his believers to follow him for the sake of personal profit. "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth your hand now and touch

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<sup>80</sup> This is a slight exaggeration for God does restrain some evils in the world (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

<sup>81</sup> Non-theists may not accept the existence of the Holy Spirit and His work in evangelism.

<sup>82</sup> William Rowe, "Paradox and Promise: Hick's Solution to the Problem of Evil," 117.

all that he has; he will surely curse you to your face” (Job 1:9–11). Thus, Job’s blessings were taken away from him to test (strengthen and purify) his commitment.

A case can also be made that believers are expected to suffer *more* evils than non-believers. As will be discussed later, besides the evils (moral, natural, and social) that befall all people who live in this world, believers may experience (extra) pain and suffering<sup>83</sup> as part of God’s process of edification, discipline, deterrence, or rehabilitation.

Rowe’s requirements for a theodicy (i.e., answers to the four problems of evil) as well as other philosophers and theologians’ many conditions are met by the “Tough-love Proposal,” thus showing its strength and versatility and satisfying the research project objective of providing a reasonable and novel theodicy for the age-old “problem of evil.”

### **5.3 Conclusion.**

In summary, the “Tough-love Proposal” appears to meet the various requisites suggested by scholars for a theodicy. Nevertheless, everyone is free to make up his/her mind about the subject. If one wants to adopt the position of non-theism, one may surely do so. With this stand, there is no God, no afterlife. This present world is all there is, whatever humans make of it. There is no creator, no heaven, or hell. Dr. Richard Dawkins wrote: “In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at the bottom, no design, no purpose, *no evil*

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<sup>83</sup> The believers’ pain and suffering are central to Marilyn Adams’ thesis on the problem of evil. Marilyn McCord Adams, “Redemptive Suffering as a Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil,” 210–31. Dr. Cottingham also advocates the concept of redemptive suffering. John Cottingham, “Evil and the Meaning of Life,” 11–26.

*and no good.* Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor care. DNA just is. And we dance to its music (emphases mine)<sup>84</sup> DNA and people came from “the primordial soup”<sup>85</sup> or “hydrothermal vent,”<sup>86</sup> and will return to it.

In the meantime, “human beings have a degree of choice and control over their lives and must take some responsibility for the way they turn out . . . Illness, floods, or earthquakes may have natural causes or happen by chance . . . It is up to human beings to fight evil and suffering and solve the world’s problems if we can.”<sup>87</sup> If we are able to take care of our own troubles, we will live fuller lives since God (as a loving parent) bears us no ill will<sup>88</sup> and does not begrudge us our happiness. Non-theists can enjoy life and do much good in this world. Bill and Melinda Gates’ “foundation has spent more than \$36 billion to fund work in global health, emergency relief, education, poverty, and more.”<sup>89</sup>

However, if we decide for whatever reason to ask for God’s help (and therefore acknowledge his existence), he always stands ready to welcome us back to a loving relationship with him.

Thus far, we have given reasonable answers to five of the research questions posed at the beginning of this project (pages 7–8). Contrary to Rowe’s assertion, God can exist in the presence of evils (gratuitous or otherwise). We have given a morally justifying reason (i.e. “tough love”) for why an Omnigod would allow evils in our world. We have shown that humans are responsible for their behavior and must live with the consequences, whether good or evil. The “Tough-love

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<sup>84</sup> Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*, 133.

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/early-life-theory-of-primordial-soup-1224531>

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/02/100202101245.htm>

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.humanismforschools.org.uk/pdfs/evil%20and%20suffering.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), the father (i.e., God) bears no ill will toward his son.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Kotecki, “Bill and Melinda Gates Were Just Named the Most Generous Philanthropists in America.” <https://www.businessinsider.com/biggest-projects-of-generous-philanthropists-bill-and-melinda-gates-2018-8>

Proposal” also provides a cogent response to Rowe’s “Evidential problem of evil.” Furthermore, it meets all the requirements raised by Rowe and other well-known scholars for a “successful” theodicy, yet without appealing to any religious material as required by Rowe’s Restricted Standard Theism.

There are some further research questions that have not yet been answered. Why does God not create humans with free will and no evil (e.g., like humans in heaven)? Does God behave in the same way with believers and non-believers?

The next section will address the questions of believers, people who pursue God and desire to know him better. The “Tough-love Proposal” will be discussed as it relates to Christian theists only.<sup>90</sup> Further answers<sup>91</sup> for the problem of evil will be gathered from Christian Scriptures.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Religions other than Christianity will not be discussed.

<sup>91</sup> Questions like the following will be answered using Christian Scriptures. Does God use “tough-love” with believers? How can a non-believer become a believer?

<sup>92</sup> The “Tough-love Proposal” for theists will use Christian Scriptures to explain the relationship between God and his believers. Obviously, God’s response to theists is different from his response to non-theists. Michael Peterson commented: “We should not avoid appeal to any form of EST (Extended Standard Theism) because its prior probability is lower than that of RST (Restricted Standard Theism).” Michael L. Peterson, “Christian Theism and the Evidential Argument from Evil,” 176.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE TOUGH-LOVE PROPOSAL FOR THEISTS

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this segment for Christian theists, besides findings from other fields of knowledge (e.g., criminal justice) and case studies (e.g., The Lisbon earthquake), we will use Christian Scriptures as well as other religious literature to support the thesis that God uses “Tough-love” with believers as well as non-believers. As mentioned in the methodology section (page 8), we will adopt the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics to interpret scriptural passages. The events from the Bible are assumed to be historically accurate and to reflect the cultures of their time. The genres of the texts (e.g., poetry, gospel), the near and broader contexts of the verses, the tenor of the whole Bible, the historical background of the writings, and the determinations of theologians over the centuries will be considered. Thus, this project sits squarely in the field of systematic and historical theology.

Before addressing God’s plan for believers, we will discuss some of God’s attributes that relate to the problem of evil. Using the concepts of God’s “simplicity” and “impeccability,” we will address the problem of the creation of a free will human being who never sins (research sub-objective # 6, page 8). Following the biblical account, we will trace the history of humans’ creation, fall, and God’s rescue operation/salvation plan. Believers (like non-believers) are free to follow God or to rebel against him. They may decide to persist in rebellion and face their creator’s “tough love” (e.g., the Prodigal Son of Luke 15). In answer to the question whether God deals in the same way with believers versus non-believers (research sub-objective # 7, page

8), we will show that he provides *his children* with a “way of escape,” from temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13), and that “all things work together for good to *those who love God*” (Romans 8:28).

## 6.2 God’s Attributes

### 6.2.1 God’s Impeccability.

Dr. Vincent Brümmer said: “In the Christian tradition, God’s perfect goodness has generally been held to entail that he has the attribute not only of *impeccantia* (freedom from sin), but also of *impeccabilitas* (inability to sin).”<sup>1</sup> Dr. Wierenga added that impeccability is “the inability to do what is morally wrong.”<sup>2</sup> Dr. Henderson observed that impeccability requires more than just an inability to commit evil actions, it also emphasizes the additional quality of moral virtue.<sup>3</sup> “God, who, *being most holy and righteous*, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the morally virtuous God does not commit evil (Habakkuk 1:13), cannot sin,<sup>5</sup> is not the author of sin, cannot be tempted by evil, and does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13).

### 6.2.2 God’s Omnipotence.

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith*, 271.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes*, 203.

<sup>3</sup> “Under this conception of impeccability, the agent not only will be unable to perform acts of sin or evil, the agent’s character will be so virtuous that he or she will be unable to form the desire, motivation, and intention to perform acts of sin or evil.” Luke Henderson, “Heaven,” 180.

<sup>4</sup> Westminster Confession, Chapter V, section IV.

<sup>5</sup> God’s impeccability is commonly accepted. See Agustín Echavarría, “Aquinas on divine impeccability, omnipotence, and free will,” 1–18. However, Christ’s impeccability is subject to much debate. Michael Canham, “*Potuit Non Peccare* or *Non Potuit Peccare*,” 93–114.

“Omnipotence is the power of God to effect whatever is not intrinsically impossible . . . As intrinsically impossible must be classed: 1. Any action on the part of God which would be out of harmony with his nature and attributes; 2. Any action that would simultaneously connote mutually repellent elements.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, God cannot act inconsistently with his nature and moral character (e.g., lie, Numbers 23:19). Thomas Aquinas stated that God cannot do illogical things. “Whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility.”<sup>7</sup> For example, God cannot make a square circle, as a circle, by definition, is not a square. Dr. Plantinga averred: “God can create free creatures, but He can’t *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right . . . He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so,”<sup>8</sup> for that would be contradictory and illogical.

In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God’s omnipotence is absolute. “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27). “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). God’s power is unlimited, and nothing is too difficult for him to accomplish.

### 6.2.3 God’s Sovereignty.

“Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and in earth” (Psalm 135:6). “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure” (Isaiah 46:10). “For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for his stretched-out hand, who can

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<sup>6</sup> “Omnipotence.” *New Advent Encyclopedia*. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11251c.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.25.3.

<sup>8</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30.

turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:27). From these verses, we gather that God can do whatever he desires, *according to his nature and attributes*. Dr. Charles Ryrie stated: “Ultimately, God is in complete control of all things.”<sup>9</sup> No one can thwart his will or frustrate his plans.

#### 6.2.4 God’s Omniscience.

“Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; his understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5). “God is greater than our heart and knows all things” (1 John 3:20). “I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done” (Isaiah 46:9–10). Dr. Lewis Chafer opined: “According to His Word, God assuredly foreknows, foreordains and executes.”<sup>10</sup> Dr. Berkhof wrote: “The knowledge of God is not only perfect in kind, but also in its inclusiveness. It is called *omniscience*, because it is all-comprehensive . . . He knows all things as they actually come to pass, past, present and future . . . It is perfectly evident that Scripture teaches the divine foreknowledge of contingent events.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, God’s knowledge is perfect and unlimited, including all past, present, future, and contingent events.

#### 6.2.5 God’s Benevolence (Goodness).

Dr. Grudem wrote: “The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval.”<sup>12</sup> God’s goodness is unique and

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 280.

<sup>11</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 67.

<sup>12</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 197.



unequaled. “No one is good except God alone” (Luke 18:19). Dr. Berkhof added: “He is the fountain of all good . . . All the good which the creatures enjoy in the present and expect in the future, flow to them out of this inexhaustible fountain.”<sup>13</sup> God is good to all his creatures and especially to his followers. “The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” (Psalm 145:9). “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11 NIV). God is omnibenevolent, all-good for “in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

#### 6.2.6 *God’s Providence.*

Dr. Millard Erickson said: “Providence may be thought of having two aspects. One aspect is God’s work of preserving his creation in existence, maintaining and sustaining it; this is generally called preservation or sustenance. The other is God’s activity in guiding and directing the course of events to fulfill his purposes.”<sup>14</sup>

God provides for *all* his creatures whether they are believers or non-believers, for the good as well as the evil people. “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). Dr. William Shedd wrote: “The stream of divine providence, so signally conspicuous in the life of the church, and of its members, is the stream upon which the diffident as well as the confident must alike cast themselves.”<sup>15</sup> God cares for the whole creation, humans, animals as well as plants. “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them . . . Observe

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<sup>13</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 360.

<sup>15</sup> William Shedd, *Discourses and Essays*, 180.

how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.” (Matthew 6:26–29).

God is intimately involved in guiding and preserving his creation. He is neither an “absentee landlord,” nor a “dead” creator.<sup>16</sup> If he does not blatantly reveal his presence (e.g., by appearing in the sky) or demand credit for his work (e.g., by requiring recognition and worship), it may be because he desires a true (and freely given) love relationship with humans.

However, whether God’s existence is acknowledged or not, he is still the Lord and the “universal governor” of this world. “The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.” (Psalm 24:1). By his sovereign will, God guides and directs the events of this world to their predetermined conclusion (Christ’s return and the final judgment, Revelation 22:12). In the meantime, people are free to choose between the two God-given paths: acknowledge God and his lordship or reject and deny his existence.<sup>17</sup> The choice and its (good or evil) consequences are theirs to make!

### 6.2.7 God’s Holiness.

Dr. Berkhof wrote: “The Hebrew word for ‘to be holy,’ *qudash*, is derived from the root *qad*, which means to cut or to separate . . . Its fundamental idea is that of a *position* or *relationship* existing between God and some persons or thing (emphases in original).”<sup>18</sup> “Holy,

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<sup>16</sup> The “Tough-love Proposal” is *not* deism. Although people may not see God’s work in preserving his creation and governing the world (thus thinking that he does not exist or is dead), God is *actively* involved in calling them back to him. Yet, he does not do so in a blatant or coercive manner (e.g., audibly talk to them). “Truly, You are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, Savior!” (Isaiah 45:15).

<sup>17</sup> Humans are not “doomed” to the *one and only* path decreed/foreknown/actualized by God. See Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*

<sup>18</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 73.

Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3). “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). “Without holiness, no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14, NIV). Since God is holy, he must *separate* himself from (i.e., cannot have a relationship with) unholiness (e.g., sin and evil). *Holiness is a requirement for communion with God.* By believing in Christ, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a *holy* nation, a people for God’s own possession” (1 Peter 2:9) having received “the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:9). Thus, believers are forgiven, declared “holy,” and enjoy a personal relationship with God. “‘And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me,’ says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18). “But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name” (John 1:12). We are to be holy as God himself is holy (Leviticus 20:26, 1 Peter 1:16).

#### 6.2.8 *God’s Love.*

“Love began with God when he created the world and us . . . God’s primary nature is to love as shown by his rescue plan for us through his son Jesus Christ.”<sup>19</sup> “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). Dr. Thomas Oden wrote: “God’s love for humanity, like all love, is reciprocal. God prizes the world and values especially human creatures, who have the freedom and imagination to respond to God.”<sup>20</sup> Dr. Vincent Brümmer added: “Love must by its very

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<sup>19</sup> “God is Love.” <https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/god-is-love/>

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology Vol 1*, 121.

nature be a relationship of free mutual give and take, otherwise it cannot be love at all.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, love “does not mean suspending judgment or discernment about our actions and behavior. It does not mean coddling . . . like a spoilt baby. Unconditional love is much bigger than that, much tougher and more truthful.”<sup>22</sup> Love has many facets, “tender love” as well “tough-love.” Love may involve correction, discipline for the purpose of edification and holiness. “For those whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives” (Hebrews 12:6).

#### *6.2.9 God’s Justice.*

“Justice is rooted in the very nature of God (Isaiah 40:14). He evenhandedly rewards good, and he does not ignore the sins of any . . . At the same time, God rarely delivers instant justice.”<sup>23</sup> Dr. John Miley wrote: “The Scriptures freely express the reality of moral feeling in the divine judgment of human conduct. For the good, there is loving approval; for the evil, displeasure and wrath.”<sup>24</sup> God is just and does not play favorites. He loves his creatures but does not ignore their sins. “For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are those who wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18). “But the Lord abides forever; he has established his throne for judgment, and he will judge the world in righteousness; he will execute judgment for the peoples with equity” (Psalm 9:7–8). God’s justice is tempered by love and love by justice.

#### *6.2.10 God’s Simplicity.*

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<sup>21</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology*, 161.

<sup>22</sup> Stephanie Dowrick, *Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love*, 231.

<sup>23</sup> “Justice.” <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/justice/>

<sup>24</sup> John Miley, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*, 198.

There are many more attributes of God (e.g., omnipresence, wisdom, faithfulness). They are discussed in works by various scholars.<sup>25</sup> The attributes of God are not a motley collection of characteristics added together, nor are they additions to his being. Thomas Aquinas said: “It is clear that God is nowise composite but is altogether *simple*.”<sup>26</sup> Augustine wrote: “What is meant by ‘simple’ is that its (God’s) being is identical with its attributes.”<sup>27</sup> Anselm concurred: “That he (God) is simple in such a way that all the things that can be said of his essence are one and the same thing in him.”<sup>28</sup> Dr. Wayne Grudem opined: “God’s whole being includes all of his attributes . . . *every attribute of God also qualifies every other attribute* (emphases in original).”<sup>29</sup>

As an analogy, a diamond has four characteristics, the four Cs: carat, cut, color, and clarity. The cut impacts the carat (weight) of the final product. The carat of the original stone may determine its cut. The clarity of the gem may impact its color. The color of the raw specimen may influence the way it is cut. Likewise, the attributes of God are not divisible and separate. They are all one and the same with God. Dr. Berkhof wrote: “From the simplicity of God, it follows that God and his attributes are one.”<sup>30</sup> Augustine affirmed: “We say it (the Trinity) is simple, because it is what it has.”<sup>31</sup>

God is love/omnipotence/omniscience/omnibenevolence/omnipresence/justice . . . The attributes of God are like the facets of a precious stone. Each attribute describes the same gem, although with a slightly different emphasis from a human point of view (e.g., God’s just love versus God’s loving justice). A diamond’s attribute cannot be transmitted piecemeal to a

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<sup>25</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.3.7.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, XI. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Anselm, *Basic Writings*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 179.

<sup>30</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 44.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, XI. 10.

different material. For example, a diamond's "clarity" cannot be given to iron. The four Cs of a diamond, if transmitted, must be imparted as a whole. Likewise, God's attributes (or better, "attribute," singular), if given, must be conveyed *in toto*.<sup>32</sup> If so, can God create a free will human who never sins, as posed in our research question (page 8)?

### 6.3 The Creation of Humans.

Following the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics, we will assume that the events described in Genesis as well as in the rest of the Bible are historically accurate. "God created Man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Many theories<sup>33</sup> have been suggested concerning the actual process of humans' creation. Due to its versatility, the "Tough-love Proposal" can accommodate the various proposed views. Whether humans were created through the slow process of evolution or through

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<sup>32</sup> Theologians sometimes classify the attributes of God as "communicable" versus "incommunicable." For example, omnipresence is an incommunicable attribute as it cannot be given to humans. Love is a communicable attribute as they can love God and others. However, their love is not at the same level as God's love. Therefore, even a communicable attribute cannot be given to them in full measure. "None of these attributes is completely communicable. It is better to say that those attributes we call 'communicable' are those that are *more shared* with us (emphases in original)" Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 157.

<sup>33</sup> Some believe that the theory of evolution (i.e., Humans evolve from lower life forms) is unreliable. "The problem with evolution, however, is that it is a theory that has yet to be proved." <https://bible.org/seriespage/5-human-race-its-creation-history-and-destiny-creation-humans>

Young Earth Creationism affirms a literal six (24 hour) days creation and that the earth is less than 12,000 years old. <https://answersingenesis.org/creationism/young-earth/young-earth-creationist-view-summarized-and-defended/> Old Earth Creationism advocates that the "old" earth age of millions of years is correctly estimated by geologists. Old Earth Creationism is divided into Gap Creationism (literal six 24-hour days creation but with a gap in time between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2) and Day-Age Creationism (figurative six "days," each "day" is actually years). Day-Age creationism is subdivided into Progressive Creationism ("God created each species a unique creation, not evolving from a previous species") and Theistic Evolution ("God used the process of evolution to create life on earth"). <http://www.oldearth.org/old.htm>

Intelligent design "holds that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection . . . Creationism typically starts with a religious text and tries to see how the findings of science can be reconciled to it. Intelligent design starts with the empirical evidence of nature and seeks to ascertain what inferences can be drawn from that evidence."

<http://www.intelligentdesign.org/whatisid.php>

de novo creation or otherwise, God may still use “tough-love” to bring them back to himself. As we are all “congenital non-theists,” we need to come to God through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, the continued efforts of the churches, and (if stubbornly resisted), through the last expedient of “tough-love.”

After the creation of humans, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Thus, Adam was made “very good.”<sup>34</sup> He was created “in the image of God,” but he was obviously not the same as God. “You have made him a little lower than God” (Psalm 8:5). God has free will<sup>35</sup> and is impeccable in his nature (i.e., cannot sin). Humans also have *some* free will<sup>36</sup> but they are peccable in nature (i.e., able to sin).<sup>37</sup> Dr. Benjamin Warfield wrote: “[We have] freedom of the will, which was the crowning good of our divinely created nature.”<sup>38</sup> However, humans do not have “more” free will than God because they can sin, and God cannot.<sup>39</sup> They can sin because they are lower than God and do not share God’s attribute of

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<sup>34</sup> Some have claimed that since the Hebrew “meod” meaning “very,” and the Hebrew “towb” meaning “good” are used rather than the Hebrew “tamim” meaning “perfect, blameless,” God’s creation (e.g., humans) was not perfect. This is debatable. See Hugh Ross et al., *Life and Death in Eden, The Biblical and Scientific Evidence for Animal Death Before the Fall*, audio cassette set, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> “Since then God necessarily wills his own goodness, but other things not necessarily, as shown above (Article 3), he has free will with respect to what he does not necessarily will.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.19.10. “But our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases” (Psalm 115:3). However, that does not mean that he is free to do illogical things (e.g., make a square circle) or free to act contrary to his nature (e.g., free to lie). Questions have been raised whether God is significantly free. See Wesley Morriston, “Is God Significantly Free?” 257–64. Also see Edward Wierenga, “The Freedom of God,” 425–36.

<sup>36</sup> Humans’ free will is fairly limited. We have no say on our parentage, looks, talents, social background . . . However, we can decide whom we want to marry or not marry at all. We can decide to believe in God’s existence or not.

<sup>37</sup> “Man’s original capacities included both the power not to sin and the power to sin (posse non peccare et posse peccare). In Adam’s original sin, man lost the posse non peccare (the power not to sin) and retained the posse peccare (the power to sin)—which he continues to exercise. In the fulfillment of grace, man will have the posse peccare taken away and receive the highest of all, the power not to be able to sin, non posse peccare.” Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, note 229, 105.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Warfield, *Two Studies in the History of Doctrines*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> J. W. Hendryx, “Do Humans Have More Freedom Than God and Does God Have a Libertarian Free Will?”

[http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/02/do\\_humans\\_have\\_more\\_freedom\\_th\\_1.php](http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/02/do_humans_have_more_freedom_th_1.php)

God “seems constitutionally incapable of choosing (or even wanting) to do what is wrong. According to Plantinga’s description of morally significant free will, it does not seem that God would be significantly free.” James Beebe, “Logical Problem of Evil.” Humans’ ability to sin is not a proof of a greater free will; it is a result of their lack of impeccability, an attribute that belongs only to God.

impeccability. Their free will is much more restricted than God's as they can only control a few of their circumstances (for example, even the greatest "control freaks" among us cannot control accidents or diseases)!

Why doesn't God create humans with the attribute of impeccability in Eden? Would it not be better that they have free will but are unable to sin? Unfortunately, impeccability cannot be given apart from the other attributes of God (due to God's "simplicity" as affirmed by Augustine),<sup>40</sup> since "God and his attributes are one."<sup>41</sup> For example, impeccability cannot be given separately from omnipotence. Can humans receive omnipotence? What is an omnipotent human? Is an omnipotent human still a human or is he God?<sup>42</sup> For humans to have impeccability, God would have to create God.<sup>43</sup> However, a "created" god is not God since God is not "created" but always existed.<sup>44</sup> "Even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God" (Psalm 90:2). "I am

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<sup>40</sup> Augustine discussed the "simplicity" of God in *De Trinitate (On the Trinity)*, VI.6 and VI.8.

<sup>41</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 44.

<sup>42</sup> Someone may say: "What about Christ? He is omnipotent and impeccable and yet he is a human! Therefore, God could make humans impeccable." The question whether Christ is impeccable or not is subject to much debate and has not been resolved. See Michael Canham, "*Potuit Non Peccare or Non Potuit Peccare*," 93–114. Also see John McKinley, "Four Patristic Models of Jesus Christ's Impeccability and Temptation," 29–66. Whether Christ was impeccable or not, that fact does not prove that God can make humans impeccable. Christ is God but "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). As God, Christ already has the attribute of impeccability. A related question can be raised. "Did Jesus give up some of his divine attributes while on earth (the kenosis theory)?... The word *kenosis* is taken from the Greek verb *kenoo*, which generally means 'to empty' . . . The emptying includes role and status, not essential attributes or nature." Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, 240.

<sup>43</sup> Dr. Schellenberg claimed that God could (and should) give finite beings "good-without-evil" (i.e., impeccability). "God's motive in creating the world is the motive to share with finite beings good-without-evil." J. L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," 44. Dr. J. L. Mackie said: "There was open to him (God) the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good." J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 209. However, this is not possible since God cannot create humans with God's attribute of impeccability for God would have to create God.

<sup>44</sup> "God cannot create something uncreated. In other words, God cannot create God." Phillip Cary, "A Classic View," 21. However, Dr. Evan Fales argued: "What I contest is that a creature could not have these characteristics, and hence that God could not create such a creature. I will call such a creature a *perfect creature* (PC), a creature that is an exact duplicate of God save for one characteristic: aseity." Evan Fales, "Theodicy in a Vale of Tears," 358.



the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no God” (Isaiah 45:5). God did not (and could not) create another God as there can be no other God but one.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, humans were created “lower than God,” with (limited) free will and the ability to sin.<sup>46</sup> They lived in a “state of innocence,” as affirmed by Thomas Aquinas,<sup>47</sup> in a close relationship with God, and without the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>48</sup> Adam (and probably Eve as his “helpmate”) was tasked by God to rule over the animals and care for his environment (e.g., Eden, Genesis 2:15–20).

#### **6.4 The Fall of Humans and the Origin of Evil on Earth.**

When he was created, Adam was warned by God not to eat from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”<sup>49</sup> “For in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). God clearly gave humans two choices: not eat the fruit and live or eat the fruit and die.<sup>50</sup> Dr. Peter van Inwagen averred: “While they may have been unlike us in many ways, they were

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<sup>45</sup> Dr. O’Connor claimed: “He (God) could carefully select from among the many possibilities a suitably good one in which everyone happened to choose the good at all times. Then he could have a world with free choices that is also free of the evil consequences of the misuse of freedom.” Timothy O’Connor, “The Problem of Evil: Introduction,” 307. Unfortunately, God cannot create “impeccable” free will creatures who always choose to do good and never commit evil for they would be Gods by sharing his attribute of impeccability.

<sup>46</sup> Angels also had the capacity to sin (i.e., peccable) and some of them did sin and rebel against God. “The devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:8). “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). Whether the “good angels” can still sin and fall is not addressed in the Scriptures.

<sup>47</sup> “Many authorities of the Saints declare that man possessed grace in the state of innocence.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. 1.95.1.

<sup>48</sup> Does God have knowledge of good and evil? One would have to say yes since God is omniscient. Nevertheless, such knowledge does not lead to evil/sin since God is impeccable. On the contrary, humans, as peccable creatures, cannot successfully handle the knowledge of good and evil. Thus, God commands them to abstain from such knowledge.

<sup>49</sup> “Evil” is the Hebrew “Ra” with the meanings “bad, evil, wicked, adversity, calamity, and wrong.” Francis Brown, S. Driver, and Charles Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 948–49.

<sup>50</sup> For non-theists, the command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil can be taken figuratively to mean a choice to obey (i.e., good) or disobey (i.e., evil).

not children and were at least as intelligent as we; they fully understood the warning and the wisdom and authority of its Source.”<sup>51</sup>

After some time in the garden of Eden,<sup>52</sup> Adam freely chose to disobey God<sup>53</sup> and lost his state of innocence. He committed evil in his rebellion and was no longer holy and sinless. His “iniquities have made a separation between him” (Isaiah 59:2) and his holy God, for “without holiness, no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). The holy God and the disobedient/unholy Adam can *no longer* live together in close communion. Adam had to depart and live away from God’s presence (i.e., John Milton’s “Paradise Lost”).<sup>54</sup>

How did Adam who was created sinless, innocent, and “very good,” fall into evil? Did God put a “kernel” of evil, a “pre-evil” desire in his heart that would later blossom into unbelief and rebellion? Or did the “very good” somehow spontaneously deteriorate and corrupt itself into

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<sup>51</sup> Peter van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy,” 373.

<sup>52</sup> For non-theists, the “Garden of Eden” can be understood figuratively. The “Tough-love Proposal” for non-theists does not require a literal garden with a “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” a speaking serpent or the creation of Eve literally from Adam’s rib. Adam obeyed God’s command not to eat from the tree for a period of time, until the creation and fall of Eve.

<sup>53</sup> According to the Bible, the talking serpent was Satan (“the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, Revelation 20:2). Eve was tempted by the serpent, ate the fruit and gave it also to her husband Adam (Genesis 3:6). Obviously, Adam could have refused to eat the forbidden fruit offered by his wife. He could have asked God how to proceed. Sadly, Adam selected the forbidden option. Since Adam was given two options (i.e., obey or disobey) and was commanded by God to choose the path of obedience, Adam was fully responsible for his action and would have to live with the consequences. Adam cannot blame his disobedience on the serpent or on Eve.

<sup>54</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

evil (as suggested by Dr. Phillip Cary)?<sup>55</sup> If God could make gold that never deteriorates into lead,<sup>56</sup> why couldn't he make a "very good" creation that never deteriorates into evil?<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, did God "causally determine,"<sup>58</sup> "foreknow but allow,"<sup>59</sup> or "actualize"<sup>60</sup> a chosen world in which Adam will *definitely* disobey and sin? If so, was God responsible (or partially responsible) for his fall, as affirmed by Dr. Hasker?<sup>61</sup>

In the "Quantum Proposal,"<sup>62</sup> God created two real options for Adam to choose from: the path of obedience/life (where he could continue to live in a close fellowship with God without

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<sup>55</sup> "The first sin does not originate from one good thing corrupting another but from a good thing corrupting itself." Phillip Cary, "A Classic View," 22. The question then becomes: "How can a good thing corrupt itself?" Did God create a good thing with a potential for evil? Can it be called "good" if it carries the seed of evil in itself? Are all good things created by God inherently corruptible? "The answer to the question why God made corruptible things cannot be that it belongs essentially to creatures to be corruptible, unless one gives up the view that in the new creation, we will be unable to sin and to get sick and die." William Lane Craig, "The Molinist Response," 144. Dr. Henderson said: "Once in heaven, the redeemed will forever be completely virtuous and incapable of sinning." Luke Henderson, "Heaven," 181.

<sup>56</sup> "Sir Isaac Newton: mathematician, physicist, astronomer, alchemist. Yes, the man who invented calculus and derived the law of universal gravitation also practiced alchemy, the ancient and secretive pseudo-science of turning base metals into gold. Newton spent years working at his furnace with dangerous and smelly combinations of the raw materials of alchemy—mercury, silver, lead and sulfur. He was convinced that not only could gold be made but also that ancient alchemists had done so." Ruth Kassinger, "Alchemy." [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/1999/03/10/alchemy/b56cba8a-4f70-4efb-84a6-0cd1f78afc3b/?utm\\_term=.fa89711010b8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/1999/03/10/alchemy/b56cba8a-4f70-4efb-84a6-0cd1f78afc3b/?utm_term=.fa89711010b8)

<sup>57</sup> John Hick wrote: "The basic criticism, then, is that a flawless creation would never go wrong and that if the creation does in fact go wrong the ultimate responsibility for this must be with its creator." John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 43.

<sup>58</sup> "If the act is according to the agent's desires, then even though the act is causally determined, it is free, and the agent is morally responsible." John Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things," 37.

<sup>59</sup> "If God foreknows that Adam will sin, then Adam will sin—that's beyond dispute." David Hunt, "The Simple-Foreknowledge View," 75.

<sup>60</sup> "He (God) is dealt a hand of cards having all true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom printed on them . . . God must now play with the hand he has been dealt, that is to say, actualize a world that is feasible for him given the counterfactuals that are true." William Lane Craig, "A Molinist View," 38.

<sup>61</sup> William Hasker raised the issue of God's responsibility: "God, facing no constraints other than that of logical consistency, has *deliberately chosen that every instance of sin and evil should occur exactly as it does occur*, and has taken all the steps necessary to guarantee that this will happen. The persons who commit the sins are fully responsible and guilty for them (and some will suffer in hell eternally because of them), even though there was never any real possibility that they would do otherwise. And on the other hand, God, who is the author of this drama, is entirely free of any guilt or responsibility (emphases in original)." William Hasker, "The Open Theist Response," 153.

<sup>62</sup> See Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*.

the knowledge of evil) and the path of disobedience/death<sup>63</sup> where he could decide to commit evil (thus learning about “good and evil”)<sup>64</sup> and would have to be separated from the holy God (i.e., death, a separation from the living God). In love, God gave him a clear warning, explained the outcomes of the two options (life or death), and forbade him from selecting the disobedient (i.e., evil) scenario. He was then free<sup>65</sup> to make his own decision without any coercion and without God’s physical presence.<sup>66</sup> By choosing to disobey God, he had to bear full responsibility for his action.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The path of disobedience/death is a *logical* requirement, a metaphysical necessity for humans to have free will to obey (i.e., good) or disobey God (i.e., evil). As asserted by Augustine, evil is “the privation of the good” rather than an independently created thing. Augustine, *Enchiridion*. IV, 12. Dr. Hasker wrote: “It is important to realize, in the light of the doctrine of creation, that every being created by God is in itself good, that evil is not a thing in itself (as it was for Augustine’s Manichean opponents) but rather a defect or corruption in what is essentially good and valuable.” Hasker, “The Open Theist Response,” 152. Dr. Plantinga said: “To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, he must create creatures capable of moral evil; and he can’t give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so.” Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30. Thus, God is not morally at fault for the presence of evil in the world.

<sup>64</sup> The tree of the “knowledge of good and evil” was well-named as the knowledge of evil could only be acquired through disobedience of God’s specific command (i.e., the fruit of the tree is forbidden on penalty of death). Before the Fall, Adam had no intellectual or experiential knowledge of evil as there was no evil in his environment. Adam and creation were declared “very good.” Presumably, all of Adam’s actions were “very good.” He must have obeyed God’s other commands without fail (e.g., rule over all the animals by giving them names, cultivate the garden of Eden). However, this particular command about the tree and its fruit carried with it a dire warning and a severe penalty. Adam’s disobedience and rebellion against God may be the source of evil rather than the fruit of a particular tree. With the knowledge of good and evil, humans are now free to choose their paths and will be held accountable for their actions (i.e., “tough love”).

<sup>65</sup> Humans have free will to choose between the two paths created/foreknown by God (good/life or evil/death). Since God wants his creatures to freely and voluntarily love/obey him, he gives them free will to choose to love/obey (resulting in “good”) or not love/disobey him (resulting in “evil”). As it is illogical to ask God to make a square circle, it is likewise irrational to demand that he gives humans free will (to obey or disobey) and at the same time insist on precluding any possibility of disobedience. It is a matter of *logical requirement* rather than a self-limitation of God’s omnipotence or omniscience as asserted by some scholars. See Bruce Reichenbach, “God Limits His Power,” 101–24. Also see Clark Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” 143–62. The “Tough-love Proposal” does not claim that free will is *necessarily* a “great, outweighing good” or *necessarily* leads to a “greater good” (i.e., a consequentialist view of ethics). Free will can be a blessing (if used correctly) or a curse (if misused) as humans can exercise their free will to love/obey God or to hate/disobey their creator.

<sup>66</sup> The omnipresent God was “not present” (the divine hiddenness) when Eve and Adam decided to eat the fruit. They were not influenced in any way in their decisions to obey or disobey as God intentionally stayed out of the picture.

<sup>67</sup> In the Bible, the serpent was held responsible for his part in the Fall due to his deliberate temptation of Eve (Genesis 3:14–15). Eve was also held responsible for her decision to disobey God. “To the woman he (God) said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children’” (Genesis 3:16). “Virtually all human mothers experience pain in childbirth, and delivery takes much longer than in other mammals. For example, in University of New Mexico researcher Leah Albers’s 1999 study of 2,500 full-term births, labor lasted on average almost nine hours for first-time mothers. In comparison, apes and monkeys generally give birth within two hours.

The path (i.e., world) chosen by Adam was *not* the most perfect world. It was neither the best of all possible worlds,<sup>68</sup> nor “the best possible means of achieving the best possible world.”<sup>69</sup> It was the forbidden way, the path of evil that condemned (sinful, unholy) humans and all their descendants<sup>70</sup> to untold miseries as they had to live far away from God’s presence and protection. They gratified their desires for the knowledge of good and evil<sup>71</sup> and, as a result, fully experienced the heartbreaks of horrendous moral (e.g., the Holocaust) and natural calamities (e.g., Hurricane Katrina). “For the creation was subjected to futility . . . slavery to corruption . . . For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (Romans 8:20–22).

The obedient path would have been a more perfect world (if not *the* perfect world) as humans could continue in fellowship with God in the total absence of evil (e.g., moral, natural, social, horrendous, gratuitous, excessive . . .), yet with some free will to make decisions and

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Cross-culturally, assistance in childbirth is almost universal. Although evolution ought to favor low-risk, easy deliveries, this is not how it turned out for humans.” Pat Shipman, “Why Is Human Childbirth So Painful?” 426. “Labor times for other animals tend to be much shorter than for humans. It can take more than 24 hours for a woman to give birth, but dogs go through labor in about an hour. Cattle take about two to three hours. Horses can give birth within 30 minutes.”

[http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/explainer/2012/09/animals\\_giving\\_birth\\_dolphins\\_bear\\_newborns\\_easily\\_but\\_hyenas\\_risk\\_death\\_.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/explainer/2012/09/animals_giving_birth_dolphins_bear_newborns_easily_but_hyenas_risk_death_.html)

Adam was condemned to “toil” by the sweat of his brow and to return to the dust at the end of his life (Genesis 3:17–19). According to a 2017 Gallup poll conducted worldwide, “85% of people hate their jobs.”

<https://returntonow.net/2017/09/22/85-people-hate-jobs-gallup-poll-says/>

<sup>68</sup> Dr. Hudson proposes a multiverse theory, “by which I mean any universe that is somehow or other sectioned into numerous divergent regions . . . it (the multiverse theory) strengthens the case for our world’s being the best (or among the unsurpassable).” Hud Hudson, “Best Possible World Theodicy,” 242–43.

<sup>69</sup> Randy Alcorn, “*If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil*,” 194. In the “Tough-love Proposal,” the best possible way to achieve the best possible world is to adopt the path of obedience/life.

<sup>70</sup> The doctrine of the transmission of a sin nature to Adam’s descendants is accepted by many Christian theists (e.g., Millard Erickson and Wayne Grudem) though not by all (e.g., Danielle Shroyer, *Original Blessing: Putting Sin in Its Rightful Place*). Pelagianism claims that Adam’s sin nature and guilt are not transmitted to his descendants.

Therefore, infant baptism is not necessary to remove sin or guilt. Arminianism avers that Adam’s corrupted nature is transmitted to his descendants, but the guilt is either not transmitted or is counteracted by “prevenient grace.”

Calvinism teaches that Adam’s sin nature and guilt are transmitted to his descendants. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 565–583. As an analogy, physical descendants of a slave are also slaves. “You were slaves of sin” (Romans 6:17). Thus, all descendants of slaves of sin are also slaves of sin.

<sup>71</sup> The doctrine of humans’ total depravity does not rule out humans’ “good” actions. “It does not imply: (1) that every man is as thoroughly depraved as he can possibly become.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 246.

select their actions within the boundaries set by God (e.g., care for the garden, name the animals).<sup>72</sup> Sadly, they forfeited this option when they chose to disobey and spurn God's advice.

The origin of moral and natural evils in this world stems from Adam's poor choice of rebellion and disobedience. As he was not coerced into that decision and as he willfully trespassed God's stern command and warning, he had to shoulder full responsibility for his action, and live with the dire consequences (i.e., "tough love"). Since he had wished to know evil, after the Fall, he and his descendants experienced evil in full measure, away from the blessed Eden and God's protecting influence. For this disaster, he has no one to blame but himself!

As a result of the Fall, humans are now separated from God and alienated from him. They no longer recognize God's existence or sovereignty over them. They are too busy carving out their own independent paths and seeking their own pleasures and fulfillments. "Just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice" (Romans 1:28–29).<sup>73</sup> God, in his disapproval of humans' stubborn refusal to acknowledge him, (reluctantly) allowed them to go their own way. Yet, in love and compassion, God did not leave them in their predicament. He provided a rescue plan, a path of salvation for his fallen creatures. To that "way of escape" (1 Corinthians 10:13), we will now turn!

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<sup>72</sup> How long can this situation (i.e., the "age of innocence") last? We do not know as this is not addressed in the Christian Scriptures. Was there a specific time frame for the "age of innocence" after which the "test of obedience" would be completed and humans would be "confirmed" and delivered forever from the possibility of committing evil? Some believed that was the case for Adam. "If God had not confirmed Adam at the expiration of the specified term, he would have acted contrary to truth and faithfulness; and consequently, he would have done wrong, provided Adam had stood." William C. Davis, *The Gospel Plan*, 229.

<sup>73</sup> This is the Scriptural foundation for the "Tough-love Proposal."

## 6.5 The Rescue Operation/Salvation Plan.

Even though humans freely chose to disobey and separate themselves from their creator, God did not want to leave them to their fate (the protevangelium<sup>74</sup> of Genesis 3:15, referred later in Romans 16:20). The omniscient God was not caught off-guard by their decision to disobey him. In God's righteousness and foresight, the disobedient path had always included a plan of redemption for them. Thus, a mistake, if made, would not be final. Although rebellion was not God's recommended option (or the best possible scenario), he was willing to provide a means of forgiveness and reconciliation for his creatures. He endeavored a rescue operation, a way to bring them back into fellowship with him. Various approaches could be considered for a restoration plan. Dr. Peter van Inwagen brought up four issues concerning God's plan to "bring this state of affairs (humans' evil circumstances) to an end."<sup>75</sup>

### 6.5.1 The "Forgive and Forget" Approach.

Peter van Inwagen raised the question: "Why didn't God immediately restore his fallen creatures to their original union with him?"<sup>76</sup> Could God just forgive his disobedient and sinful creatures, forget the trespasses, move on, and live with them as before? Could God just void the threatened punishment for disobedience ("In the day that you eat from it you shall surely die," Genesis 2:17)?<sup>77</sup> However, would that make God's dire warning (i.e., death, a capital punishment) an "empty threat"? Would God be obeyed in the future?

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<sup>74</sup> Dr. Kidner mentioned the protevangelium as "the first glimmer of the gospel." Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, 70.

<sup>75</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," 379.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> "Death in reference to man is regarded in Scripture much more as the privation of life in the sense of a state of favor with God and consequent happiness than as the mere cessation of animal life." *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*.

Is justice one of God's attributes? Can he be unjust and still be God? Can he ignore sin and disobedience, forgive and forget, live and let live? "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Genesis 18:25). After all, if we discipline our children for disobedience, should we expect anything less from God?<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, can a holy God continue to live in close communion with sinful humans? "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you" (Isaiah 59:2). "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14, NIV). Thus, a holy God had to separate himself from evil, "for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). God, in his justice and holiness, cannot overlook humans' disobedience and rebellion. "And, we may add, if he did, what would happen next? What would prevent the fall from immediately recurring?"<sup>79</sup>

### 6.5.2 The "Enabling" Approach.

Peter van Inwagen asked a second question: "Why doesn't God protect his fallen creatures from the worst effects of their separation from him: the horrible pain and suffering?"<sup>80</sup>

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<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/2-17.htm>. Adam did not physically die on the day he disobeyed.

However, he was no longer able to live in close communion with God as he had to leave Eden and God's presence.

<sup>78</sup> God may discipline believers (e.g., Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5) as well as non-believers (e.g., the Canaanites were destroyed by the Israelites, Joshua 5–12). Dr. Morrision avers: "Even if God has a right to command one people to annihilate another, he would not exercise that right unless he had a morally sufficient reason for doing so." Wesley Morrision, "The Problem of Apparently Morally Abhorrent Divine Commands," 148. The morally sufficient reason may be: "Do not defile yourselves by any of these things (incest, bestiality); for by all these, the nations (the Canaanites) which I am casting out before you (Israel) have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I (God) have visited its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants" (Leviticus 18:24–25). Furthermore, God patiently waited 400 years before the final judgment "for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). Finally, not all Canaanites were killed. Those who repented were spared (e.g., Rahab and her family, Joshua 6:25).

<sup>79</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," 380.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.



Since no one is born with an innate knowledge of God and since most people live far away from God's presence, a good life without much pain and suffering will just perpetuate the unsatisfactory situation, keeping them from seeking God and returning to a close relationship with him. C. S. Lewis said: "Pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>81</sup> Pains and sufferings are God's "tools" to bring humans back to him (i.e., "tough love"). The removal of torments and miseries through God's miraculous intervention will just enable us to move further away from him. After all, why should we change course when everything is going well and to our liking? Why take any risk and upset the status quo? "If we are satisfied with our existence, why should we even consider turning to God and asking for his help?"<sup>82</sup>

God loves us too much to enable us to continue on our destructive path. In his wisdom, he lets us discover for ourselves that a world without God lacks meaning and is subject to human vagaries and horrendous evils.<sup>83</sup> May be then, we would consider giving up our declared independence from God and turn to him for help.<sup>84</sup> "Repent and return, so that your sins may be

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<sup>81</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 91.

<sup>82</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," 381.

<sup>83</sup> Not everyone is subject to the same amount of pain and suffering. It appears that the poor and the ones afflicted with much pain and suffering turn to God in greater numbers. "The churches in Asia are primarily made up of the poor—those among the one-fourth of the world's population living on just a few dollars a week."

<https://www.gfaau.org/about/faqs/>

"In the West our blessings have left us content without revival. If a man can live without revival, then he will be content without it. But when he is desperate for a touch from heaven, then God will bring brokenness—and he will no longer trust in the arm of the flesh." Kevin Turner, "Why Isn't the American Church Growing?"

<http://www.swi.org/through-kevins-eyes/featured-articles/why-isnt-the-american-church-growing/>

<sup>84</sup> Since no one has seen God at any time and no one (that we can talk to and trust) ever came back from the dead to tell us about the existence of an afterlife, we are taking some risk when we decide to trade this world for a future one. Personally, I would rather be wrong in the company of Mother Teresa, Chuck Colson, and Billy Graham than be right in the company of Stalin, Chairman Mao, and Hugh Hefner.

wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

### 6.5.3 *The “Substitution” Approach.*

Since humans constantly commit horrendous evils, the holy God must render righteous judgment (rather than just “forgive and forget” or continue to “enable” them to go on their path of rebellion). However, the loving God is unwilling to let them perish far away from his presence. Sin and disobedience require a separation from the holy God, but love demands a close communion between a benevolent creator and his creatures. What can be done to remedy the situation and resolve the dilemma?

At 4:30 am on September 5, 1972, eight tracksuit-clad members of the Black September Organization, a faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), carrying duffel bags loaded with assault rifles and explosives scaled the 6 ½ ft. (2 meters) chain-link fence surrounding the Olympic village in Munich, Germany.

Using stolen keys, the commandos entered the Israeli apartments, killed two members of the team who resisted and captured nine. Six were able to escape in the confusion.

“Soon after, the terrorists threw a note out of a window with their demands—the release of 236 prisoners within 4 hours and safe passage out of Germany. They threatened to kill two of their hostages every half hour after the 9 a.m. deadline.”<sup>85</sup> “Golda Meir, the Israeli prime minister, was absolutely firm. ‘If we should give in, then no Israeli anywhere in the world can feel that his life is safe.’”<sup>86</sup> However, refusing the terrorists’ demands would certainly mean

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<sup>85</sup> Edward Mickolus and Susan Simmons, *The 50 Worst Terrorist Attacks*, 17.

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2012/may/02/50-stunning-olympic-moments-munich-72>

violence and bloodshed. “What the Germans wanted least of all was to find themselves with yet more Jewish blood on their hands.”<sup>87</sup> The “Munich police chief and the head of the Egyptian Olympic team, negotiated directly with the kidnappers, offering them unlimited amounts of money.”<sup>88</sup> They tersely replied: “Money means nothing to us; our lives mean nothing to us.”<sup>89</sup> What was left to be done to resolve the stalemate, short of violence?

To safeguard the lives of the Israeli athletes, the German Federal Minister of the Interior Hans-Dietrich Genscher offered himself and other volunteer German officials to serve as substitute hostages. Unfortunately, the German offer of substitution was turned down. The Munich terrorist attack ended up in mayhem. All the Israeli hostages perished in a rescue attempt along with five of their captors. Much later, in his memoirs, “Genscher describes at length his efforts to win the hostages’ freedom, including direct talks with the terrorists and his offer to substitute himself as a hostage in place of the athletes. He concludes: ‘The president of the German Red Cross even planned to confer the golden pin of honor on me for offering myself in exchange for the hostages. I assured him that what I had done was nothing out of the ordinary and I did not deserve to be honored.’”<sup>90</sup>

Since only a non-hostage person can substitute himself for a hostage person, only a non-sinful human can substitute for a sinful human.<sup>91</sup> A non-sinner may be very difficult to uncover on this earth. A non-sinner who would be willing to take *our* deserved punishment for sins (i.e., death, eternal separation from the holy God) would be near impossible to find. Due to the dearth

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/dabe/tragedy-in-munich.htm>

<sup>89</sup> Edward Mickolus and Susan Simmons, *The 50 Worst Terrorist Attacks*, 17.

<sup>90</sup> Philip Zelikow, “After the Wall.” <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/01/reviews/980301.01zelikot.html>

<sup>91</sup> According to Lifeway Research, 8% of Americans claim that they are not sinners, 10% assert that sin does not exist. 5% say they are sinners and they are fine with that. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/august/most-americans-admit-sinners-romans-3-for-all-have-sinned.html>

Obviously, non-sinners or happy sinners have no need for a substitute or a savior.

of such a candidate in this world, is it surprising that the benevolent God, in love, took the form of a human and substituted himself for us? “The Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory” (John 1:1,14). The sinless God took our sins and punishments on himself and paid the penalty for us (i.e., substitution),<sup>92</sup> as there was no other possible way to bring us back into a holy relationship with him.<sup>93</sup> Jesus said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me” (John 14:6).

However, no one is forced to accept the substitution. It is there, available to all comers, to anyone who may be willing to accept the offer. One can be free from the penalty of sin and return to a close relationship with the creator!

#### *6.5.4 The “Age of Evil.”*

Peter van Inwagen raised a third question: “Why has God allowed ‘the age of evil’ to persist for thousands and thousands of years?”<sup>94</sup> God’s reasons may not be completely known. However, we can venture some opinions concerning the extended length of the “age of evil.”

First, in the “Tough-love Proposal,” God may let humans go their own way, explore their options, develop their own solutions, learn from their successes and failures, and decide without any coercion to either pursue their independent paths (with its good and evil) or turn back to God

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<sup>92</sup> Christ’s death as a “penal substitution” for humans is not the only theory proposed by theologians. Some popular theories include: the ransom to Satan theory, the moral influence theory, the example theory, and the governmental theory. See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 581–82. The Wesleyan Arminian view of atonement includes some of these theories. See J. Steven Harper, “A Wesleyan Arminian View,” 228–32.

<sup>93</sup> In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God provided a redeemer (i.e., himself) in the path of disobedience. Obviously, this is not the recommended path as it is painful and costly for both God and us. However, the loving and benevolent God could hardly abandon his creatures if they somehow decide out of free will to ignore his warning and disobey his commands.

<sup>94</sup> Peter van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy,” 379.

and seek his help (e.g., acknowledge his existence and accept his offer of substitution). Since people are slow learners, this process may easily take centuries, for they always hope that the answers to their many problems may be just “around the corner,” and that they can handle everything themselves without the need to surrender their independence. However, is the overall situation improving or deteriorating?

“In a survey run by YouGov (in 2015) . . . 71% of respondents said they thought the world was getting worse, and only 5% said that it was getting better.”<sup>95</sup> “According to a survey (done at the end of 2016) of more than 21,000 people from 36 countries in all regions of the world, about 60 percent agree that the world has become worse in the past year, rather than getting better or staying the same.”<sup>96</sup>

Have we learned and matured over the centuries? Are mass murders/genocides quaint items only found in the distant past, in the dusty, arcane books of yesteryear or are they common fare in our tweets and digital news?

The list of genocides in the history of mankind, ranked by death toll, is as follows: 1. The Holocaust (1939–1945, up to 11 million deaths). 2. The Ukrainian genocide (1932–1933, up to 7.5 million deaths). 3. The Cambodian genocide (1975–1979, up to 3 million deaths). 4. The Belarussian genocide (1941–1944, up to 2 million deaths). 5. The Soviet “ethnic cleansings” (1920–1951, up to 1.5 million deaths). 6. The Armenian genocide (1915–1922, up to 1.5 million deaths). 7. The Rwandan genocide (1994, up to 1 million deaths). 8. The Genocide of Cathars during the Crusades (1209–1229, up to 1 million deaths). 9. The Greek genocide (1914–1922, up

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<sup>95</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/science/head-quarters/2015/jan/16/declinism-is-the-world-actually-getting-worse>

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2017-05-31/most-think-the-world-has-gotten-worse-in-the-last-year-survey-says>

to 750,000 deaths). 10. The Assyrian genocide (1915–1923, up to 750,000 deaths).<sup>97</sup> With the exception of the genocide of Cathars (13<sup>th</sup> century), all the remaining genocides in the top ten list occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for a combined total of 29 million deaths.

The list of worldwide mass shootings ranked by death toll is as follows: 1. The Garissa University College Attack in Kenya (2015, 148 deaths). 2. The Peshawar School Massacre in Pakistan (2014, 141 deaths). 3. The Paris Terrorist Attack (2015, 130 deaths). 4. The Oslo Attack in Norway (2011, 67 deaths). 5. The Westgate Shopping Mall Attack in Kenya (2013, 67 deaths). 6. The Las Vegas Shooting (2017, 58 deaths). 7. The South Korea Shooting (1982, 56 deaths). 8. The Orlando Nightclub Shooting (2016, 49 deaths). 9. The Sousse Beach Mass Shooting in Tunisia (2015, 38 deaths). 10. The Virginia Tech Shooting (2007, 32 deaths).<sup>98</sup> Of the top ten mass shootings, only one occurred prior to 2000. The other nine happened between 2007 and 2017 with the US leading with three incidents followed by Kenya with two occurrences.

Is the US drug problem abating after intensive public education, extensive (and expensive) rehabilitation programs, and severe penalties for drug traffickers?<sup>99</sup> “In 2014, 27.0 million people age 12 or older used an illicit drug in the past 30 days, which corresponds to about 1 in 10 Americans (10.2 percent). This percentage in 2014 was higher than those in every

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<sup>97</sup> “It does not include non-genocidal mass killing such as the Thirty Years War, the Mongol Holocaust, the Japanese War Holocaust, the Blockade famine and other atrocities during the Nigerian Civil War, the Congolese Holocaust, the 1965 & 66 Indonesian Politicide or the Great Leap Forward.”  
[https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoyipizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/List\\_of\\_genocides\\_by\\_death\\_toll.html](https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoyipizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/List_of_genocides_by_death_toll.html)

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-deadliest-mass-shootings-in-history.html>

<sup>99</sup> “Attorney General Jeff Sessions just sent out a memo asking federal prosecutors to pursue the death penalty in drug trafficking cases — implementing President Donald Trump’s plan from earlier this week to ramp up “tough on crime.” <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/21/17147580/trump-sessions-death-penalty-opioid-epidemic>

year from 2002 to 2013,”<sup>100</sup> “up from 8.3 percent in 2002.”<sup>101</sup> In 1980, the drug overdose deaths in the US was around 7000. In 2016, it has ballooned to an approximate 64,000 deaths.<sup>102</sup> On October 26, 2017, the US president “declared the opioid epidemic a national public health emergency,” saying, “Nobody has seen anything like what is going on now.”<sup>103</sup>

Are there less suicides among teenagers in the US as a result of better prevention<sup>104</sup> and advanced treatments?<sup>105</sup> “The suicide rate for white children and teens between 10 and 17 was up 70% between 2006 and 2016, the latest data analysis available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Although black children and teens kill themselves less often than white youth do, the rate of increase was higher — 77%.”<sup>106</sup> “The number of kids hospitalized for thinking about or attempting suicide doubled in less than a decade,”<sup>107</sup> from “0.66% in 2008 to 1.82% in 2015.”<sup>108</sup> According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, “among teenagers, suicide attempts may be associated with feelings of stress, self-doubt, pressure to succeed, financial uncertainty, disappointment, and loss. For some teens, suicide may appear to be a solution to their problems.”<sup>109</sup> “Suicide is typically the third leading cause of death

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<sup>100</sup> Sarra Hedden et al., “Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.” <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FRR1-2014/NSDUH-FRR1-2014.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse, “Nationwide Trends.” <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/nationwide-trends>

<sup>102</sup> Josh Katz, “Drug Deaths in America Are Rising Faster Than Ever.” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/05/upshot/opioid-epidemic-drug-overdose-deaths-are-rising-faster-than-ever.html>

<sup>103</sup> Dan Merica, “Trump Declares Opioid Epidemic a National Public Health Emergency.” <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/26/politics/donald-trump-opioid-epidemic/index.html>

<sup>104</sup> <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-suicide-prevention>

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/suicide/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20378054>

<sup>106</sup> Jayne O'Donnell and Anne Saker. “Teen Suicide is Soaring. Do Spotty Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Share Blame?” <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/03/19/teen-suicide-soaring-do-spotty-mental-health-and-addiction-treatment-share-blame/428148002/>

<sup>107</sup> Jamie Ducharme. <http://time.com/5279029/suicide-rates-rising-study/>

<sup>108</sup> Gregory Plemmons et al., “Hospitalization for Suicide Ideation or Attempt: 2008–2015.”

<sup>109</sup> [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Teen-Suicide-010.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Teen-Suicide-010.aspx)

for young Americans but rose to the second leading cause of death in 2016.”<sup>110</sup> Can this trend be reversed?

Humans are responsible for the moral and natural evils in this world (research question on page 7) as they declare their independence from God in this protracted age of evil, spurning Christ’s offer of substitution and salvation. Thus, in “tough love,” God allows them to go their own way resulting in horrendous evils (e.g., the Holocaust, The Rwandan genocide). In light of these facts, are humans convinced that they need help with their dire problems, or do they believe that they should persist in their self-determined paths?

In 2017, Max Roser, an Oxford economist opined: “The last 200 years brought us to a better position than ever before to solve problems. Solving problems – big problems – is always a collaborative undertaking. And the group of people that is able to work together today is a much, much stronger group than there ever was on this planet. We have just seen the change over time; the world today is healthier, richer, and better educated.”<sup>111</sup> In the presence of such views, should people be surprised that the “age of evil” continues unabated? What would it take for humans to finally turn back to God? When will they “hit bottom” and come to their senses? Will it ever happen?

The second reason why “the age of evil” is extended over many centuries may be God’s desire to be patient and long-suffering toward his creatures. “With the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:8–9). Should we not take advantage of this reprieve to turn back to

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<sup>110</sup> <http://fortune.com/2018/05/16/teen-suicide-attempts-rise-study/>

<sup>111</sup> Max Roser, “The Short History of Global Living Conditions and Why It Matters That We Know It.” <https://ourworldindata.org/a-history-of-global-living-conditions-in-5-charts>



him? Furthermore, as we are all faced with death, should we not be concerned about the afterlife? “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Either at our death or when the Lord returns (whichever comes first), it would be too late to repent and accept his gift of substitution. As long as we still have life and breath, it is still possible to change our mind and acknowledge him. The decision is ours to make for God does not force himself on his creatures or coerce them to love him.

Third, according to Dr. Peter van Inwagen,<sup>112</sup> God may also desire a large and diverse community of believers from all the peoples of the planet rather than just a few tribes clustered around the Middle East. God said to Abraham: “By your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 26:4). According to the Pew Research Center, “a comprehensive demographic study of more than 200 countries finds that there are 2.18 billion Christians of all ages around the world, representing nearly a third of the estimated 2010 global population of 6.9 billion . . . The number of Christians around the world has nearly quadrupled in the last 100 years, from about 600 million in 1910 to more than 2 billion in 2010. But the world’s overall population also has risen rapidly, from an estimated 1.8 billion in 1910 to 6.9 billion in 2010. As a result, Christians make up about the same portion of the world’s population today (32%) as they did a century ago (35%).”<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, “the center of Christianity has moved to the Global South.”<sup>114</sup>

Finally, God may want to teach his people patience, endurance, obedience, trust, and love in the midst of pain and suffering. True love demands sacrifice, a sacrifice of oneself to one’s beloved. “Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a

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<sup>112</sup> Peter van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy,” 384.

<sup>113</sup> Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>

<sup>114</sup> Aaron Earls. “7 Surprising Trends in Global Christianity in 2019.” <https://factsandtrends.net/2019/06/11/7-surprising-trends-in-global-christianity-in-2019/>

fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2, NIV). In view of Christ’s love and sacrifice, Paul said: “I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Romans 12:1).

Philip was raised in a Christian family, the third of four siblings. In high school, he showed a great flair for acting, impressing his teachers who suggested that he should become an actor. However, after meeting a missionary who told him about some tribe in the Ecuadorian jungle, he contemplated mission work. In 1952, Philip “waved goodbye to his parents and boarded a ship for the 18-day trip from San Pedro, California to Quito, Ecuador.”<sup>115</sup>

After three years in Ecuador, many Quichuas had been converted and disciplined. Philip then decided to reach out to the Huaorani deep in the Ecuadorian jungle. Unfortunately, the Huaorani were violent people who had murdered many Quichuas. “They had also killed several workers at an oil company-drilling site near their territory. The oil company closed the site because everyone was afraid to work there.”<sup>116</sup>

Five missionaries were dropped off by plane and built a tree house by the river. Finally, “two Auca (Auca. meaning “savage,” is a pejorative used for the Huaorani by the Quichua) women walked out of the jungle. Jim (Philip James Elliot) and Pete (Pete Fleming) excitedly jumped in the river and waded over to them. As they got closer, these women did not appear friendly. Jim and Pete almost immediately heard a terrifying cry behind them. As they turned, they saw a group of Auca warriors with their spears raised, ready to throw. Jim Elliot reached for the gun in his pocket. He had to decide instantly if he should use it. But he knew he couldn’t. Each of the missionaries had promised they would not kill an Auca who did not know Jesus to

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<sup>115</sup> <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/jim-elliott-no-fool-11634862.html>

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

save himself from being killed. Within seconds, the Auca warriors threw their spears, killing all the missionaries,”<sup>117</sup> leaving behind five widows and nine fatherless children.

Jim Elliot had written in his journal: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”<sup>118</sup> “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it” (Luke 9:24). “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20). As Christ was crucified for us in love, so should his followers in love put down their lives for him.

The “age of evil” will continue until the time of Christ’s return.<sup>119</sup> Hopefully, by then, humans will recognize that they have been on the wrong path and will turn back to God. On that day, people from all nations and all walks of life will praise God for his long-suffering and patience. The believers’ faith will be strengthened as they learn obedience, endurance, and true love in sacrifice. “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

#### 6.5.5 *The “Distribution of Evil.”*

Peter van Inwagen asked a final question: “Why do the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper?”<sup>120</sup> Why does evil fall indiscriminately on good and bad people?

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/faq/20.htm>

<sup>119</sup> Christ’s return date is unknown. “But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Mark 13:32).

<sup>120</sup> Peter van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy,” 379.

In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God lets humans go their own way and do what they desire. Thus, the wicked may abuse their freedom, power, and money to oppress the innocent, the poor, and the weak (e.g., Hitler and Stalin). Of course, the rich and powerful may also use their resources for the good of humanity (e.g., Bill Gates and Warren Buffett). The innocents do not always suffer, nor do the wicked always prosper. This world has a mixture of good and evil as a result of humans’ alienation from God.

However, if they choose to return to God and obey his commandments (e.g., “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not covet”), would not the world be much better for all? Who is responsible when the innocents suffer and the wicked prosper? Humans or God? What more can God do (short of coercion) to get them to do what he *requires* in his commandments?

God’s rescue plan and offer of substitution are available to all comers. They can return to God and voluntarily obey him, making a better life (and a better world) for themselves and their children. However, the decision is theirs and theirs alone for God does not demand love from anyone. The world (and its distribution of evil on the guilty and the innocent)<sup>121</sup> is whatever people make of it and they have no one to blame but themselves!

God aims to rescue his creatures by providing a path/plan of salvation for everyone. He takes on himself the punishment for sinners (i.e., substitution) so that they may live and have fellowship with him. The choice to accept or reject his offer is theirs to make! What are the

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<sup>121</sup> “Incredible amounts of pain and suffering fall equally on the innocent and the guilty.” William Rowe, “Paradox and Promise: Hick’s Solution to the Problem of Evil,” 117. In the “Tough-love Proposal,” such pain and suffering help bring people back to God. Once they are in a relationship with their creator, pain and suffering may be a result of their own actions (e.g., DUI). Evils may also be the consequences of other people’s actions (e.g., robberies). However, God promises believers that “all things work together for good to those who love God,” (Romans 8:28). Finally, pain and suffering may come from God himself for the edification of believers, punishment for misdeeds (i.e., discipline of believers), deterrence, or rehabilitation. These concepts will be addressed later in the discussion.

benefits of accepting God’s proposal? Are there any promises/guarantees for people who willingly return to God?

## **6.6 Believers and the Promises of God.**

People who return to their creator and accept his offer of substitution become “children of God,” and are given much help in this “age of evil.” “But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become *children of God*, even to those who believe in his name” (John 1:12). “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11).

### *6.6.1 God’s Kindness to Believers.*

In God’s grace, believers are declared righteous (i.e., right with God as the penalty for sins has been charged to the substitute, Jesus Christ). “He (God) would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). “God retained the integrity of his character as a moral governor; that he had shown a due regard to his Law, and to the penalty of the Law by his plan of salvation. Should he forgive sinners without an atonement, justice would be sacrificed and abandoned . . . A full compensation, an equivalent, has been provided by the sufferings of the Savior in the sinner’s stead, and the sinner may be pardoned.”<sup>122</sup>

As believers’ sins are forgiven, they are no longer separated from the holy God and may have a close relationship with him. “In him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of

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<sup>122</sup> *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible.* <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/romans/3-26.htm>

promise” (Ephesians 1:13). Thus, all believers receive the Holy Spirit of God, a privilege not accorded to many (i.e., only to sons and daughters). “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Galatians 4:6). “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Holy Spirit gives believers power to carry out their tasks. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit “will teach you all things” (John 14:26), “He will guide you into all the truth . . . and he will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13). Thus, believers are not left alone in this world. God, through his Holy Spirit, dwells with his people and helps them in their trials and temptations in this wicked realm!

#### *6.6.2 God Answers Believers’ Prayers.*

God promises believers that he will answer their prayers. He encourages them to pray to him and asks him for whatever they need. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7–8). “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2). Thus, we are commanded to ask in order to receive, sometimes to get even more than what we actually requested. “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20–21). When we do not get the exact response we hope for from God, we often interpret that as a “no” answer. However, nothing can be further from the truth. “For as many as are the promises

of God, in Him they are yes” (2 Corinthians 1:20). God always fulfills his promises.<sup>123</sup> When we make a request, the answer will either be exactly what we ask (e.g., in academic terms, an A answer) or something better and more valuable than what we ask (an A+ answer, never a B or an F answer). Therefore, we should ask without fear or diffidence. “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). The answer will always be a “yes” or “yes plus.”

Joni was born in Baltimore, the youngest of four siblings. On July 30, 1967, Joni somehow misjudged the depth of the waters when she dove into Chesapeake Bay. She suffered a neck fracture and became a quadriplegic.

She begged God to heal her and was convinced that God would do so. “I followed every scriptural injunction: I was anointed with oil, I went to the elders, I confessed sin. I would call my friends up on the telephone and insist, ‘Hey, the next time you’re going to see me, I’m going to be on my feet. Have faith with me, believe with me.’”<sup>124</sup> She went to faith healing services without much success, wondering: “Something is wrong with this picture. What kind of Savior, what kind of rescuer, what kind of healer, what kind of deliverer would refuse the prayer of a paralytic?”<sup>125</sup>

Fifty years later, after a mastectomy for stage 3 breast cancer, chemotherapy, and chronic pain, Joni reminisced on her life and her long-ago desperate request for healing: “God is interested in a *deeper* healing. There really are more important things in life than walking. There are more important things in life than having the use of your hands. And that is having a heart

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<sup>123</sup> [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2\\_corinthians/1-20.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/1-20.htm)

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/july/joni-eareckson-tada-fifty-years-wheelchair-walk-jesus.html>

<sup>125</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/TM13-2>

that's free of the grip of sin and pride and self-centeredness. I'm not saying I've arrived—I've got a long way to go—but I'm on my way, and that's a very good feeling."<sup>126</sup> "I believe I have been healed — just not in the way that others expect."<sup>127</sup>

At a recent *Joni and Friends* family retreat in Alabama, a volunteer "gestured at the crowd and asked, 'Miss Joni, do you ever think how none of this would be happening were it not for your diving accident?' I (Joni Eareckson Tada) flashed a smile and said, 'It's why I thank God every day for my wheelchair.'"<sup>128</sup>

The loving and benevolent God kept his promise, answered Joni's prayer and gave her much more than what she asked. Joni's quadriplegia is an integral part of her ministry to the disabled and allows her to minister to many previously unreached people. "Now, every day when I wheel into the *Joni and Friends* International Disability Center, I try to squeeze every ounce of ministry effort from my quadriplegic body. This summer, *Joni and Friends* will hold 27 Family Retreats in the United States and 23 in less resourced nations, reaching thousands of special-needs families for Christ."<sup>129</sup> Is that not a "yes plus" answer to prayer?

Thus, believers can confidently come to God, knowing that he will give them what they need to carry out his will on this earth. Through his Holy Spirit, God is actively involved in the believers' prayers. "The Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words . . . He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26–27).

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<sup>126</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/july/joni-eareckson-tada-fifty-years-wheelchair-walk-jesus.html>

<sup>127</sup> <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,2016484,00.html>

<sup>128</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/reflections-on-50th-anniversary-of-my-diving-accident/>

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



### 6.6.3 God's Pledge to Believers.

Furthermore, believers are given a great pledge by God as they live in this “age of evil.” “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Is it true that all things (even “evil” things like cancer and robberies) can work together for our good?<sup>130</sup> Is it true that no “gratuitous” evil can happen to believers?<sup>131</sup>

Beth was the youngest of three siblings. She was raised in a Christian family and accepted Christ at the age of 5.

On October 13, 2005, Beth's father, Tom, was scheduled for an arthroscopic surgery on his knee to remove some torn cartilage. At five a.m. that day, Beth decided to go on a “dawn patrol” (beach slang for an early morning surf run). “Have a good time, honey . . . Remember, my surgery's today. Keep me in your prayers.” “Duh, Dad. You're always in my prayers. Gotta go!”<sup>132</sup>

A little after seven a.m., Tom was at Wilcox Memorial Hospital receiving a spinal anesthetic in preparation for the surgery. He wanted to be awake to watch the procedure on the overhead monitor. “Okay, Tom... Ready to star in your own reality show?” Just then the door to

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<sup>130</sup> “Both Adams and Stump have endorsed very strong sufferer-centered requirements on theodicy, ones which entail (perhaps with a few qualifications) that, as a result of divine providence, either (in Adams's case) no one is overall harmed by anything that happens to them or (in Stump's case) something overall harmful can happen to someone only if they freely fail to appropriate the goods their suffering made possible.” Dustin Crummett, “Sufferer-Centered Requirements on Theodicy and All-Things-Considered Harms,” 72. In the “Tough-love Proposal,” believers cannot suffer all-things-considered harms *unless* the evils come from their own actions against God's commands and advices.

<sup>131</sup> Gratuitous evils may happen to non-believers since God lets them go their own way. However, with believers, God promises to cause “all things to work together for good to those who love God.” Thus “evils” in their lives cannot be gratuitous, *unless* they choose to disobey God and bring evils on themselves. Even then, God promises to forgive and restore them if they repent. Thus, God provides a “meticulous providence” for his followers. The “Tough-love Proposal” is a general-policy theodicy for non-theists and a specific-benefit theodicy for Christian theists. For a discussion on general-policy theodicy and specific-benefit theodicy, see William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 61.

<sup>132</sup> <https://www.guideposts.org/better-living/positive-living/surfer-bethany-hamiltons-strong-faith-after-shark-attack>

the operating room flew open. A doctor stuck his head in. “Dr. Rovinski, we gotta have this O.R. right now! We’ve got a shark attack victim.” “Who?” “A thirteen -year-old girl from the North Shore.”<sup>133</sup> Tom was wheeled out of the O.R. to make space for Beth whose left arm was bit off by a shark. A quick-thinking friend used his surfboard leash as a tourniquet to stem the profuse bleeding. “‘I was praying to God to rescue me and help me,’ Bethany said. ‘And then, I had this one pretty funny thought, I think. I was thinking, ‘I wonder if I’m going to lose my sponsor.’”<sup>134</sup>

Bethany Hamilton survived the ordeal and went back to competitive surfing with much success. She later reminisced about the incident. “Because of where Jesus brought me, I have no regrets of the adversities God has allowed me to go through . . . As you look at me, you could think, ‘Wow, have pity on her, she lost her arm to a shark.’ But I look it [sic] as something beautiful. God has taken something awful and turned it into something incredibly amazing.”<sup>135</sup> “I see that God is able to use my story to help others. Once a girl came up and told me that she had had cancer. When she learned my story, it made her realize that she didn’t need to give up. I think that if I can help other people find hope in God, then that is worth losing my arm for.”<sup>136</sup>

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2–4). “Now, for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6). Even in the midst of difficulties, we know that we are not alone for “God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So, we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=124360&page=1>

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/865603326/Surfer-Bethany-Hamilton-attributes-success-happiness-to-God.html>

<sup>136</sup> <http://www.dove.org/soul-surfer-bethany-hamilton/>

can mere mortals do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5–6, NIV). God promises us his *eternal* love, presence, and continued help.

Furthermore, God said: “I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25).<sup>137</sup> “Through repentance all which had been lost by sin, is restored . . . God, through Christ, restores the sinner, blots out sin, and does away with its eternal consequences.”<sup>138</sup> All things will work together for our good (Romans 8:28) for “greater is He who is in you (the Holy Spirit) than he who is in the world (Satan)”<sup>139</sup> (1 John 4:4). Thus, we can add statement (5) to the “Tough-love Proposal.”

- (1) God, if he exists, disapproves of humans claiming that God does not exist (Psalm 14:1).
- (2) In his disapproval, God lets them go their own way (resulting in good and evil from their free will) and, in love, patiently waits for them to return, an approach popularly known as “tough-love” (Romans 1:28–31, Luke 15:11–32).
- (3) In his disapproval, God may not intervene in humans’ environment to prevent natural evils (Romans 8:20–22).
- (4) God and evil can exist together (1 John 5:19).
- (5) *If a person returns, God promises to make all things work together for good for that person (Romans 8:28).*

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<sup>137</sup> While the promise was made to Israel, the principles of God’s forgiveness, reconciliation, and generosity can be applied universally. Following the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics, we have endeavored to apply the original meaning of the verse (i.e., a promise to Israel) to the present day situation (a promise to believers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) by considering the near context as well as the whole tenor of Scriptures (e.g., God’s forgiveness, reconciliation, and generosity in the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 as well as God’s mercy and reconciliation with Paul, the persecutor of the Church in 1 Timothy 1:13).

<sup>138</sup> *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/joel/2-25.htm>

<sup>139</sup> *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*. [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1\\_john/4-4.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_john/4-4.htm)

#### 6.6.4 God's "Way of Escape" for Believers.

In times of trials and temptations, besides help and guidance, believers are provided with a "safe exit" path, a "way of escape" so that they may not fall into sin. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to men, and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). "We have in this verse, perhaps, the most practical and therefore the clearest exposition to be found of the doctrine of free-will in relation to God's overruling power. God makes an open road, but then man [sic] himself must *walk* in it. God controls circumstances, but man [sic] uses them. That is where *his* responsibility lies (emphases in original)."<sup>140</sup> No believer has to sin or cannot resist sin. If he does sin and fall, it is because he willingly chooses not to take the "way of escape" that God provides. And for that, the believer only has himself /herself to blame!

Andrew was born in 1947 and "grew up very, very poor in Jumping Branch, W. VA . . . We never had a lot of luxuries. We never had a car. We didn't have TV until later in life."<sup>141</sup> At the age of 14, he started a construction company that slowly grew into "a water-and-sewer-pipe business that employed over 100 people,"<sup>142</sup> doing "\$16 million to \$17 million worth of work."<sup>143</sup> By December 2002, "he was already worth some \$17 million."<sup>144</sup> Andrew said concerning his faith: "I'm (a) Christian, and a Christian is supposed to tithe 10% of what they get . . . I've been doing that my whole life."<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*. [http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1\\_corinthians/10-13.htm](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_corinthians/10-13.htm)

<sup>141</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/powerball-winner-cursed/story?id=3012631>

<sup>142</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-12-13/lottery-winner-jack-whittakers-losing-ticket>

<sup>143</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/powerball-winner-cursed/story?id=3012631>

<sup>144</sup> <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/11/28/500-million-powerball-jackpot-the-tragic-stories-of-the-lotterys-unluckiest-winners/slide/andrew-jack-whittaker/>

<sup>145</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/dec/30/local/me-pastor30>

Andrew Jackson (“Jack”) Whittaker did not play the lottery regularly. He only bought tickets when the jackpot was over 100 million. On Dec 25, 2002, his 100 dollars’ worth of lottery tickets brought 314.9 million dollars in windfall. “He took the cash-out option for a lump sum of \$170 million.”<sup>146</sup> He was on top of the world, rich, famous, with a loving wife (Jewell whom he met when he was 14) and a doting granddaughter, Brandi. He “said it was the birth of his granddaughter that finally changed his obsession with work. ‘I was with my daughter going to her doctor’s visits,’ he said. ‘And Brandi waved at me on the first sonogram, so I was hooked then.’”<sup>147</sup>

Considering that he was worth \$17 million even before winning the lottery, should he give the windfall money to charity?

“On Aug. 5, 2003, thieves stole \$545,000 from his car in a West Virginia strip club parking lot while he was inside . . . On Jan. 25, 2004, robbers once again broke into his car, stealing an estimated \$200,000 in cash that was later recovered. And a string of personal tragedies followed. On Sept. 17, 2004, his granddaughter’s boyfriend was found dead from a drug overdose in Whittaker’s home. Three months later, the granddaughter (Brandi) also died of a drug overdose. Her mother, Ginger Whittaker Bragg, died five years later on July 5, 2009. Whittaker himself is alleged to be broke — a claim he made as early as January 2007 . . . He’s also being sued by Caesars Atlantic City casino for bouncing \$1.5 million worth of checks to cover gambling losses. ‘I wish I’d torn that ticket up,’ he sobbed to reporters at the time of his daughter’s death.”<sup>148</sup> “In 2005, three years after the big win, Whittaker’s wife filed for divorce,

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<sup>146</sup> <http://money.cnn.com/2015/02/10/pf/lottery-winners-losers/index.html>

<sup>147</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/powerball-winner-cursed/story?id=3012631>

<sup>148</sup> <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/11/28/500-million-powerball-jackpot-the-tragic-stories-of-the-lottorysts-unluckiest-winners/slide/andrew-jack-whittaker/>

ending nearly 42 years of marriage. This began a long-drawn out fight for Whittaker's winnings."<sup>149</sup>

“Whittaker is now married to a real estate agent and owns two businesses that ‘haven’t been doing very good. I’m still working and I’m 68 years old.’ Whittaker still dreams of winning the lotto again. Every week, he spends about \$600 buying lottery tickets.”<sup>150</sup>

No one is doomed to sin and ruin his/her life. The faithful and benevolent God takes pain to warn his followers of the dangers in this world (e.g., gambling, adultery). In love, he provides them with many ways of escape (e.g., not buy lottery tickets, not gamble at casinos, stay away from strip clubs . . .). However, they are not forced to avail themselves of God’s provided exit strategies.

In the “Tough-love Proposal,” Christians are free to disregard God’s warnings and escape plans, pursue their own chosen agendas, and live with the consequences, whether good or evil! Thus, while God did say that all things (including tragedies) can work together for good for believers (as in Joni Eareckson Tada’s and Bethany Hamilton’s cases), the promise is conditional on obedience (“to those who love God,” Romans 8:28, “He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me” John 14:21). We can hardly expect God’s blessings while we ignore his commandments and refuse to take the ways of escape that he graciously provides.

#### *6.6.5 God Forgives Believers’ Sins.*

When believers sin (and who doesn’t?), God promises that the sins, once confessed, will be forgiven. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Since we are cleansed from all

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<sup>149</sup> <http://www.euro-millions.org/america/180/>

<sup>150</sup> <http://money.cnn.com/2015/02/10/pf/lottery-winners-losers/index.html>

unrighteousness after confession, we can resume our close fellowship with God and continue to rely on his help and counsel. Furthermore, as we are forgiven by God for our sins, we must also forgive others for their trespasses against us.

Mehmet was born in 1958 in Turkey. He was a petty criminal and a gang member in his youth. He later smuggled heroin between Turkey and Bulgaria and “became a member of the Grey Wolves, a Turkish neo-fascist nationalistic terrorist organization that may have relied on the financial backing of the Turkish mafia.”<sup>151</sup> He then moved to Syria and received training in weaponry and terrorism.

In May 1981, he arrived in Rome with another back-up assassin to carry out a mission. Whether he acted independently or was a part of a larger conspiracy (Turkish Mafia? Bulgaria? Soviet Union? Iran?) is still unknown. On May 13, he waited in the crowd for Pope John Paul II to arrive at St. Peter’s Square. When the Pope passed by, he opened fire, hitting the pontiff in his left hand, right arm and lower intestines. “His motives for shooting the Pope . . . remain a mystery, but some believe he was a hitman for the Soviet-era East European security services alarmed by the Polish-born pontiff’s fierce opposition to communism.”<sup>152</sup> “(Mehmet Ali) Ağca’s accomplice, Oral Çelik, was supposed to set off a diversionary explosion to cover his escape, but lost his nerve and fled.”<sup>153</sup> The Pope survived his injuries and Ağca was caught and sentenced to life in prison.

“Four days after the attempt on his life, the Pope made a public statement forgiving Ağca and asking the world to pray for him.”<sup>154</sup> “In 1983, John Paul II visited his would-be assassin. They had a private conversation and emerged as friends. The Pope stayed in touch with

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<sup>151</sup> <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-unsolved-case-of-the-attempted-assassination-of-pope-john-paul-ii>

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> [http://mashable.com/2015/09/30/pope-john-paul-ii-assassin/#5NGn\\_xLK9uq4](http://mashable.com/2015/09/30/pope-john-paul-ii-assassin/#5NGn_xLK9uq4)

<sup>154</sup> <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-unsolved-case-of-the-attempted-assassination-of-pope-john-paul-ii>

Ağca's family during the latter's incarceration, and in 2000 requested that he be pardoned. The request was granted. Ağca was released and deported to Turkey, where he was imprisoned for a life sentence he had fled from decades prior. He renounced the Muslim faith,<sup>155</sup> converted to Christianity, and was released in 2010. "In December 2014, he returned to Rome and laid two dozen white roses at the Pope's tomb."<sup>156</sup> In a message to the Church in 1977, Pope John Paul II said: "As Scripture bears witness, God is rich in mercy and full of forgiveness for those who come back to him . . . God's forgiveness becomes in our hearts an inexhaustible source of forgiveness in our relationships with one another, helping us to live together in true brotherhood."<sup>157</sup>

Thus, God is quick to forgive believers who confess their sins and repent from their misdeeds. However, forgiveness may not mean the removal of natural consequences of one's actions nor does it guarantee an abrogation of deserved earthly discipline. God's love and compassion are always balanced by his justice, as they are all part of God's nature.

#### *6.6.6 God's Maturation of Believers through Sufferings.*

Why do believers appear to suffer the same or more than non-believers? Should we not expect that believers would receive a "better deal" from God, as far as sufferings are concerned, than non-believers?

Unfortunately, this is not the case. Believers encountered the same vicissitudes of life as non-believers since God does not want his people to follow him for selfish motives (e.g., a hope for less suffering). "Jesus answered them and said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not

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<sup>155</sup> <http://cathnews.com/cathnews/8942-agca-says-he-is-now-a-catholic>

<sup>156</sup> [http://mashable.com/2015/09/30/pope-john-paul-ii-assassin/#5NGn\\_xLK9uq4](http://mashable.com/2015/09/30/pope-john-paul-ii-assassin/#5NGn_xLK9uq4)

<sup>157</sup> [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_08121996\\_xxx-world-day-for-peace.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_08121996_xxx-world-day-for-peace.html)



because you saw signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal” (John 6:26–27). The outcome of the sufferings may be different (i.e., “all things work together for good” for believers) but the amount, kind, severity, or duration of the sufferings may be similar. Thus, no undue “enticement” is put on non-believers to adopt Christianity in return for some “guaranteed” promises of “health and wealth”<sup>158</sup> upon conversion, followed by a blissful paradise in the life to come.

On the contrary, Christian believers should expect to suffer more<sup>159</sup> than their non-Christian brethren. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” (John 15:19). Besides the common sufferings of this evil realm (e.g., earthquakes, cancer, robberies), Christians are faced with ostracisms for their beliefs in many parts of the world.

Graham was born in 1941 in Palmwoods, Queensland, Australia. “As a young boy, the Australian became a pen friend of one Santanu Satpathy of Baripada (India) with whom he shared his birthday.”<sup>160</sup> In 1965, he visited his friend in Baripada and decided to stay as a missionary. Working among the tribal poor, he founded the Mayurbhanj Leprosy Home to care for the ostracized lepers. “He spoke fluent Oriya and was very popular among the patients.”<sup>161</sup> Using his language skills, he helped translate the New Testament into the local language. He also

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<sup>158</sup> “Health and wealth” theology is widely proclaimed and remains very popular (e.g., Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, T. D. Jakes . . .).

<sup>159</sup> Pain and suffering come to believers as a result of living in this fragile and sinful world (i.e., moral, natural, and social evils). They may also be the result of ostracisms from non-believers. Challenges and difficulties may be God’s work to edify, discipline, deter, or rehabilitate his children. Furthermore, believers are expected to share in the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 4:13, 2 Corinthians 1:5).

<sup>160</sup> <http://www.ibsresources.org/articles/staines.shtml>

<sup>161</sup> <http://www.southasianconnection.com/articles/341/1/Graham-Staines-and-His-Two-Young-Sons-Burnt-Alive-Wife-Forgives-Unconditionally/Page1.html>

taught the recovered patients to make mats out of rope and baskets from Saboi grass,<sup>162</sup> items they could sell to earn a living. While working with leprosy patients, he met his wife Gladys, a nurse, whom he married in 1983. They had three children, a daughter, Esther, and two sons, Philip and Timothy.

Despite the evangelistic efforts of missionaries, and “contrary to general perceptions, conversions number around 5,000 a year and the Christian population has grown marginally from 1.98 per cent in 1981 to 2.9 per cent in 1991. By that yardstick, the religious map of Orissa (Graham’s area) has not changed.”<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, some local groups claimed that Graham had lured many Hindus into Christianity. Tensions between the majority Hindus and the minority Christians steadily rose. “According to Defense Minister George Fernandes, who was part of the cabinet team to Manoharpur, there were at least 60 attacks on churches in Orissa between 1986 and 1998, ‘the highest number in any state.’”<sup>164</sup>

On the night of January 22, 1999, Graham and his two boys aged 7 and 10 attended a Christian gathering in Manoharpur village. They were sleeping in their station wagon when a mob of fifty people armed with axes attacked and set their vehicle on fire. Graham, Philip and Timothy Staines were burned alive. “Even in death they were inseparable. Charred beyond recognition and reduced to fragile frames of ashes, the three bodies lay clinging to each other in what must have been a vain attempt to protect each other and escape the mob.”<sup>165</sup>

Thus, believers are not spared from gruesome evils in this world. Besides the normal difficulties of life and the ostracisms for being a believer in a non-believing world, Christians can also expect God’s loving discipline if and when they decide to go astray. “For those whom the

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> <http://www.ibsresources.org/articles/staines.shtml>

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

Lord loves, He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons” (Hebrews 12:6–8). God loves his sons and daughters too much to let them go astray and destroy themselves in the process. Thus, God’s discipline is for the protection of believers and for their good although it may feel difficult and painful during the ordeal. Nevertheless, we need to recognize that the suffering is necessary and that it will not last forever. “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6–7). Furthermore, besides discipline, believers may encounter “evils”<sup>166</sup> as part of God’s process of edification (e.g., Job), deterrence (e.g., Paul’s thorn in the flesh, 2 Corinthians 12:7), and rehabilitation (e.g., Peter’s denials, Luke 22:54–62).

God provides believers with everything they need to survive and grow in this age of evil. In love, he always answers their prayers and gives them more than what they ask. He provides them with advice, help, and ways of escape so that they would not fall into sin. He ensures that everything will turn out for their good and benefit.<sup>167</sup> He forgives their many sins so that they

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<sup>166</sup> Of course, “evils” from the hand of God and meant by him for good are *not* evil (James 1:13). It only appears to be evil from a human point of view. Thus, we put “evils” coming from God in quotation marks. This is not to say that the end justifies the means. God does *not* decree or allow evils for the sake of some “ultimate good” (e.g., He did *not* entice Joseph’s brothers to *violate his command* concerning kidnapping in Exodus 21:16. He did not orchestrate the enslavement of Joseph for the sake of some ultimate good. The good brought about by God was accomplished *in spite of* the evil. Evil was *not* necessary for the greater good). Job’s trials from God’s hand are not evil. Ananias’ and Sapphira’s deaths are not evil as they are the result of God’s righteous discipline (Acts 5). Paul’s thorn in the flesh is not evil (2 Corinthians 12:7). Peter’s prophesied denials by Christ are not evil (Luke 22:31–38).

<sup>167</sup> As explained later in the discussion, the only true evils believers experience may be the evils they bring upon themselves by their own willful actions.

may forgive others and live at peace with everyone. Thus, believers shall proclaim: “The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life, whom shall I dread? (Psalm 27:1).

## **6.7 Conclusion.**

God, in his perfect attributes, endeavors to create free will humans who can choose to voluntarily love him or to reject his existence. In his grace and mercy, he provides a redeemer (himself) in the path of disobedience should they insist on knowing “good and evil.” While God holds open the “way of escape” through Christ, in “tough love,” he does not coerce anyone to follow him. “But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name” (John 1:12). To his followers, God gives the magnificent promise “that all things will work together for good” (Romans 8:28), the pledge of answered prayers (Luke 11:9), and the comfort of forgiveness of sins through confession (1 John 1:9). Thus, believers do not need to fear evils or the Evil One for “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

In the “Tough love Proposal,” in answer to our research question # 7 concerning God’s behavior with theists and non-theists, God does *not* act with believers in the same way as with non-believers. We added a premise (and a promise for believers) to our theodicy: *If a person returns, God promises to make all things work together for good for that person.* Gratuitous evils, asserted by Rowe and non-theists, are *not* necessary and are strictly the rebellious actions of humans who deny God’s existence and insist on doing whatever they please. For believers, no

evil can be gratuitous except for evils perpetrated by their own disobedient actions. And even then, if they repent, God may turn the evil into good.<sup>168</sup>

In answer to question # 6 concerning God's creation of a "world with free will humans and no evil," the "Tough-love Proposal" advocates the logical impossibility of the "impeccable" Omnigod (with the attribute of "simplicity") generating another "impeccable" Omnigod as the uncreated God cannot be created. A world of free will humans who never commit evil cannot be actualized, even by an omnipotent God, for God cannot beget Gods.<sup>169</sup>

Thus, in this chapter, we have given some reasonable answers to our research questions # 6 and #7 (see page 8). In the next chapter, we will address the final two research objectives: First, what are the sources of moral and natural evils in this world? Do they come from God or humans? How does the omnipotent and omnibenevolent God handle the evils (gratuitous or otherwise) for the sake of his believers? Second, how can "peccable" (i.e., potentially sinful) believers attain "union with God"?

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<sup>168</sup> In the "Tough-love Proposal," the evil done was not necessary for the subsequent good. God can (and does) provide good for his children *without* the need for evil.

<sup>169</sup> "God cannot create something uncreated. In other words, God cannot create God." Phillip Cary, "A Classic View," 21.

## CHAPTER SEVEN.

### GOD AND THE PRESENCE OF EVIL

#### 7.1 Introduction.

In this chapter, we will first discuss the research question concerning the sources of evil in this world. We will then deal with the problem of sinful human beings attaining “impeccability” (freedom from evil) in the world to come in an “eternal union with God” (research objectives # 8 and # 9 on page 8). We will show that moral and natural evils may come from our own actions, and from other people’s actions. “Evils” from God’s hands are not evil as they are meant for good. For non-theists, the pains and sufferings of this world may help bring them back to their creator. For theists, the “evils” are God’s tools for edification, discipline, deterrence, or rehabilitation. Concerning the final research objective # 9, we will argue that “union with God” and “impeccability” can be obtained through the marriage of Christ and the Church (i.e., believers).

Concerning Rowe’s “gratuitous evils,” these tragedies may happen in the lives of non-believers if they insist on asserting their independence from God and refusing to return to him even in the face of calamities in their lives or in the world.<sup>1</sup> Unlike non-believers, believers are given many promises by God to help them survive and grow in this realm replete with evils. Nevertheless, can believers experience “gratuitous evils”? While God did promise believers that he “causes all things to work together for good,” it is a conditional promise (i.e., “to those who

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Hitchens, the famous atheist, wrote *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. His last book, *Mortality*, was published posthumously after his death in 2011 from esophageal cancer at the age of 62. “The last section of *Mortality* is made up of ‘fragmentary jottings’, which the publisher notes ‘were left unfinished at the time of the author’s death’. One of these notes reads: ‘If I convert, it’s because it’s better that a believer dies than an atheist does.’” <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/31/mortality-christopher-hitchens-review>  
An unknown Jewish prisoner carved this sentence into a cell at the German concentration camp Mauthausen, “If there is a God, he will have to beg my forgiveness.” <https://imgur.com/gallery/hOdq111>

love God,” Romans 8:28). Believers, like non-believers, may experience “gratuitous evils” *if* they persist in their sins despite the “evils”<sup>2</sup> they experience. The evils may become “gratuitous” if they do not accomplish the “tough-love” goal of bringing the believers back into a renewed relationship with God.<sup>3</sup> However, evils, whether gratuitous or not, can never be blamed on God for he never entices anyone to sin (James 1:13).

## 7.2 God and Evils.

### *7.2.1 God Does Not Make Humans Commit Evil to Bring the “Ultimate Good.”*

In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God does not “decree,” “foreknow but allow,” “actualize,” or “permit” people to commit evil in order to carry out God’s plans and purposes. God’s work must be done God’s way, and that does not include decreeing or permitting humans to commit evil, not even for the “ultimate good,” for the end never justifies the means.<sup>4</sup> The apostle Paul wrote: “And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? Their condemnation is just” (Romans 3:8). Evil is never permitted or endorsed by God. It is strictly humans’ doing and responsibility, a course of action they choose freely in rebellion against God’s commands and holy standards.

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, the “evils” may no longer be evil if they accomplish their goal of bringing believers back to God.

<sup>3</sup> Whether believers who persist in their sins without repentance are “true” believers or not is subject to much debate. “Those who do not continue in the faith show that there was no genuine faith in their hearts in the first place.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 793. However, Free Grace proponents “have argued . . . that a dead faith does not refer to non-existent faith. Instead it refers to a walk of faith that is not presently active and vital.” Joseph Dillow, “What Is Dead Faith All About?” 192.

<sup>4</sup> This is a major objection to the “ultimate good” theodicies. Dr. John Bishop said: “If theists are reduced in reply to pleading that God causes evil that good may come, the logical Argument from Evil has been rebutted only at the cost of compromising distinctively theist morality.” John Bishop, “On Identifying the Problem of Evil and the Possibility of Its Theist Solution,” 50. Immanuel Kant wrote: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end.” Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 30.

For example, God did not want, permit, or entice Joseph's brothers to sell Joseph into slavery as it contradicted his later command in Exodus 21:16, "He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death." God did *not* cause the eleven brothers to sin in order to bring out the "ultimate good" (in this case, Joseph's exaltation in Egypt and the saving of many lives from famine). "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). God could have accomplished his plan and purpose without causing anyone to sin. Joseph and his brothers could have been instructed by God to go to Egypt to trade. While they were there, God could have ordered Pharaoh to seek Joseph's help in interpreting the dreams. Thus, Joseph could have been elevated to power and saved many lives without the need for evil doings by his brothers.

Furthermore, God does not want his people to commit sins just to show that God can forgive and bring good out of evil. "Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). "Evangelical Christians have developed a rather confusing habit when it comes to sharing testimonies. We have a tendency to prefer telling dramatic stories about dark, reckless pasts turned around at a sudden moment to grab the attention of the crowd and stir their emotions rather than describe the ebb and flow of real-life faith stories . . . This practice can seemingly justify delinquent behavior that occurs after the conversion experience and eliminates the Christian sin factor."<sup>5</sup> Rather than emphasizing faithfulness and lifelong loyalty to the Lord, we magnify our sinful lapses in order to dramatize God's abounding grace and forgiveness.

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<sup>5</sup> Becca Vandekemp. "What We Get Wrong About 'Giving Our Testimony.'" <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/what-we-get-wrong-about-giving-our-testimony>



However, “are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1–2).

Humans’ sins, whether by believers or non-believers, are never sanctioned, decreed, allowed, or permitted by God whether by his perfect will or permissive will.<sup>6</sup> When people choose to disobey and sin, they are doing it freely against God’s advice/command, without any coercion or enticement on God’s part, and are therefore fully responsible for their actions.

### *7.2.2 God Uses “Evil” as a Tool in this World.*

While God never condones humans’ sins and evils, God does use “evil” in this world to bring about good.<sup>7</sup> “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). The “all things” can include good and “evil” things. If we consider our original definition of evil (“Evil is a privation of the good, a deviation from moral law, a hindrance from possessing anything that is good, a wrong choice, and an action that fails to meet a standard of goodness. Evil is the occurrence of anything less than good and involves serious harm that causes fatal or lasting physical and non-physical injury”), we can appreciate that God’s use of “evil” may not actually be “evil” as it is aimed for the good of “those who love

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<sup>6</sup> “We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen, and both of these things can be spoken of as God’s will.” John Piper, *Are There Two Wills in God?* <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/are-there-two-wills-in-god>  
What God would like to see happen is often called his “perfect will”; what he actually does will to happen is often called his “permissive will.” However, John Calvin said: “No distinction between God’s will and God’s permission! . . . why shall we say permission unless it is because God so wills?” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.23.8.

In the “Tough-love Proposal,” God only has *one* will (i.e., that humans would not disobey and sin). God offers them two paths, the path of obedience and the path of disobedience. God advises/commands them to take the path of obedience. However, the decision is theirs to make without God’s interference. This is not to say that they are always offered choices. Sometimes, no choices are given in God’s sovereignty (e.g., John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ, even from his mother’s womb, Luke 1:15–16).

<sup>7</sup> “Even if God is the fundamental cause of evil, that does not have to imply that he is morally to blame for it.” Atle Søvik, *The Problem of Evil and the Power of God*, 255.

God” (i.e., faithful believers). For those who do not (yet) acknowledge God’s existence, the “evils” they encounter may fulfill the hoped-for (“tough love”) purpose of bringing them back to God, a good outcome that God desires for all his creatures.

However, whether the “evils” achieve their good intents or not depends on the people’s response. If they (believers and non-believers) decide to repent and turn back to God, the “evils” they encountered would not be gratuitous and all things (good and “evil”) would actually “work together for good *to those who love God*” (e.g., a renewed relationship with God). However, if they insist on their rebellious ways, the evils they suffered may well be gratuitous and their excruciating pains utterly “wasted.” The choice is theirs and theirs alone, for God does not coerce them into a love relationship with him.

God forthrightly declares that he does use “evil” as a tool in this fallen world. “I *am* the Lord, and *there is* none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these *things*” (Isaiah 45:6-7, KJV). “Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?” (Amos 3:6, KJV). However, “evil” is not his only (or even most prominent) tool. He also uses love, grace, mercy . . . to bring his creatures back to himself. “God is love, and the one who abides in love, abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16). “For of his fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (John 1:16). “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

### *7.2.3 God Restrains Evil in this World.*

In his mercy, the omnipotent God restrains sins and evil in the world lest humans destroy themselves and their environment. “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he

(the Holy Spirit)<sup>8</sup> who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way” (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

Humans, left to their own expedient, have invented more and more destructive (and efficient) ways to maim and exterminate people wholesale. The spear was invented c. 400,000 BC. The atlatl (a spear-thrower) was contrived c. 40,000 BC. Arrowheads (and bows) turned up c. 20,000 BC. Bronze daggers were forged c. 5000 BC. The trebuchet (a device with a swinging arm to throw projectiles) was conceived in China and the ballista (a heavy bolt-thrower) was developed in Greece c. 500 BC. Gunpowder was formulated in China c. 800 AD. Hand cannons and firearms were used by Egypt c. 1200 AD. The first submarine used in battle was designed in 1775 by the American David Bushnell. Samuel Colt patented the revolver in 1836. In 1914, the British brought tanks into battle.<sup>9</sup> Zyklon B (cyclone B), a cyanide-based pesticide was invented in Germany in 1920 and used to exterminate “most of 1.2 million Holocaust victims.”<sup>10</sup> In 1945, nuclear bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki resulting in 199,000 casualties.<sup>11</sup> There are now enough nuclear weapons to destroy the whole world many times over. “FAS (Federation of American Scientists) currently estimates that the U.S. has 1,800 nuclear weapons at the ready, compared to Russia’s 1,950 . . . It is an enormous overkill and vastly in excess of what we need for national security and international commitments.”<sup>12</sup> Will God’s call for people to

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<sup>8</sup> “The Restrainer is referred to both in the neuter (what) and masculine (he) gender. This mix of gender appears in relation to the Holy Spirit who is a person, but also described using a Greek term which is neuter in gender.”

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/revelation/related-topics/who-is-the-restrainer.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn17423-timeline-weapons-technology/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3099309/The-brain-heart-attacked-begins-stinging-chest-epileptic-seizures-Trial-Auschwitz-bookkeeper-told-gas-chamber-pesticide-weak-holocaust-victims-longer-half-hour-die.html>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med\\_chp10.shtml](http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med_chp10.shtml)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/how-many-nuclear-weapons-exist-united-nations-calls-total-elimination-n804721>

live at peace with one another be heeded? “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

Humans have despoiled their soils with toxic wastes;<sup>13</sup> they have released enormous amounts of carbon dioxide into the air;<sup>14</sup> they have polluted the water with sewage and chemicals.<sup>15</sup> “There is a ‘catastrophic’ gap between what needs to be done on climate change and what governments and companies are actually doing, the UN has warned.”<sup>16</sup> How much longer can people survive on this earth is open to question.<sup>17</sup> Pope “Francis described man’s [sic] destruction of the environment as a sin and accused mankind of turning the planet into a ‘polluted wasteland full of debris, desolation and filth.’”<sup>18</sup> Will they respond in time to the dire warnings they have been given?

Much evil has been restrained by believers who act as “salt and light” in their society (e.g., Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Chuck Colson . . .). US faith-based non-government organizations (NGO) “are known to contribute substantial resources—financial, technical, human, and in-kind—to poverty alleviation, health care provision, and relief of suffering through international development activities and humanitarian assistance.”<sup>19</sup> In 2015, the top twenty US faith-based NGO reported almost 6 billion dollars raised for international aid,<sup>20</sup> with the money

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<sup>13</sup> Claire Wolters, *Toxic Waste, Explained*. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/toxic-waste/>

<sup>14</sup> Holly Shaftel (ed.), *Climate Change: How Do We Know?* <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>

<sup>15</sup> Liping Dai, *Politics and Governance in Water Pollution and Prevention in China*.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/un-climate-change-global-warming-paris-agreement-warning-heat-rising-melting-a8028961.html>

<sup>17</sup> “Humans will not survive another 1,000 years on ‘fragile’ Earth, according to Professor Stephen Hawking.” <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3937406/Humans-NOT-survive-1-000-years-Earth-says-Stephen-Hawking-Physicist-warns-escape-fragile-planet.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/01/pope-francis-calls-on-christians-to-embrace-green-agenda>

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.faithforcommongood.org/uploads/4/8/4/9/48493789/updated\\_sources\\_of\\_revenue\\_and\\_international\\_expenditures\\_of\\_us\\_faith-based\\_ngos\\_fy2011-15.pdf](http://www.faithforcommongood.org/uploads/4/8/4/9/48493789/updated_sources_of_revenue_and_international_expenditures_of_us_faith-based_ngos_fy2011-15.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

going toward helping children (e.g., Compassion International), relieving famines (e.g., Food for the Hungry), health care (e.g., Catholic Medical Mission Board), or various international projects (e.g., Samaritan's Purse). "A report from Giving USA revealed that religiously affiliated people not only give generously to their religious congregations but are more prone to give to charities of any kind. Also, frequent attendance at religious services makes it more likely that people will give to religious causes and give more substantial gifts."<sup>21</sup> God endeavors to restrain evil through his followers, by putting their time, talents, and resources into good use to relieve the world's sufferings.

Did God also intervene through his people to curtail some particularly horrendous evils in the world? Could the Holocaust have been even worse than it was? "In a great sea of suffering, as the Pope undoubtedly saw it, there was indeed the possibility that things could be worse. This was the possibility that Pius XII reflected upon in his famous address to the College of Cardinals in 1943: 'Every word directed by us in this regard to the competent authorities [to ease suffering], and every public allusion, should be seriously considered and weighed in the very interest of those who suffer.'"<sup>22</sup> Golda Meir, foreign minister of Israel (and later prime minister) eulogized Pope Pius XII in 1958: "When fearful martyrdom came to our people in the decade of Nazi terror, the voice of the Pope was raised for the victims. The life of our times was enriched by a voice speaking out on the great moral truths above the tumult of daily conflict."<sup>23</sup>

In the "Tough-love Proposal," God lets non-believers choose their own path and suffer the consequences (e.g., horrendous gratuitous evils). No promises are made concerning

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.thebalance.com/church-vs-religious-organization-2501877>

<sup>22</sup> Michael Marrus, "Pius XII and the Holocaust: Ten Essential Themes," 49.

<sup>23</sup> David Dalin, *The Myth of Hitler's Pope: Pope Pius XII and His Secret War Against Nazi Germany*, 102.

protection from evil for non-theists. However, the offer of salvation and reconciliation is open and available to anyone who would be willing to turn back and acknowledge God's existence. God "is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Concerning believers, God promises that "all things will work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). Nothing truly harmful can happen to them. "He will not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the arrow that flies by day; of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not approach you" (Psalm 91:4–7).<sup>24</sup> Thus, faithful believers are shielded by God<sup>25</sup> from experiencing true/gratuitous evils for "greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Nevertheless, believers do experience moral evils in this world. Where do these unwelcome calamities come from?

### **7.3 The Sources of Moral Evils in Believers' Lives.**

Believers (as well as non-believers) experience moral evils from various sources.

#### *7.3.1 Moral Evils Coming from One's Own Actions.*

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<sup>24</sup> While the verse is found in the Old Testament with the context of "security of the one (Israelite) who trusts in the Lord," the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics allows us to consider the whole tenor of Scriptures (e.g., "The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one," 2 Thessalonians 3:3) and apply the promise to New Testament believers.

<sup>25</sup> True evils may come in believers' lives from their own actions as they willfully disobey God.

Moral evils can happen in one of three ways or a combination of these ways. We can bring evil on ourselves by choosing a path that is not recommended or forbidden by God.

Johnny was only 14 when he joined the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) at the behest of David Duke. Johnny's skills in promotion and organization did not go unnoticed by the Klan. "Eventually he rose to the rank of Imperial Wizard, the Klan's top leadership position. 'I finally felt like I'd found something that I could amount to in life. I would travel around to the different Ku Klux Klan rallies and the different meetings and I would give speeches.'"<sup>26</sup>

In that role, Johnny went on a radio debate about racism with the reverend Wade Watts, the African American pastor of Jerusalem Baptist Church in McAlester, Oklahoma. At the radio station, Johnny "withdrew his hand after accidentally shaking the hand of Watts recalling the Klan rule that 'physical touch of a non-white is pollution.' Instead of being insulted, the Reverend laughed and consoled him saying 'he need not worry as his black wouldn't come off.' The debate was filled with slurs and insults heaped upon Wade . . . And through it all, Wade smiled and said, 'Jesus loves you.' . . . The Reverend's final words to the Klan leader who ran out the door that day was 'God bless you, Johnny. You can't do enough to me to make me hate you. I'm gonna love you and I will pray for you whether you like it or not.'"<sup>27</sup>

In response, Johnny sent death threats to Wade, burned a cross on his front lawn and finally burned down his church. Johnny "felt like gloating, so he called Wade, using a disguised voice. Watts greeted him cordially, saying, 'Well, hello, Johnny.' He continued, 'A man [sic] like you takes the time to call me. Let me do something for you.' He begins to pray, 'Dear

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www1.cbn.com/700club/johnny-lee-clary-christ-and-ku-klux-klan>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.godyears.net/2017/08/the-redemption-of-ku-klux-klan-leader.html>

Lord, please, forgive Johnny for being so stupid.’ Then he invited all of them to dinner at Pete’s Place in Krebs.”<sup>28</sup>

By this time, the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) got involved and started infiltrating the organization. “Johnny decided his only shot of staying out of prison was to step down as Imperial Wizard. But when he did, the Klan turned on him, fearing that he was an FBI informant. ‘We knew we couldn’t trust you,’ they go. ‘If you was [sic] a true Arian warrior, you would be happy to go to prison for the White race.’ ‘Now, they all hated me. I became a person without any friends. I became a man [sic] that was an island.’”<sup>29</sup>

Johnny chose his path and had to live with the bitter consequences. He was under investigation by the FBI and threatened with imprisonment; he feared retaliation (and death) from his ex-partners; he could not find a job due to the previous association with the KKK, was totally broke and without a friend in the world (his father committed suicide with a gun and his mother disowned him). As he chose to preach the gospel of hate and intolerance toward others, he now faced the same hate and intolerance toward him. “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2). Sadly, we can bring much evil on ourselves by disregarding God’s earnest admonition to choose the obedient path and do what is right. We can make a royal mess of our lives, wake up one morning, and wonder how we ended up in this bottomless and inescapable pit!

“I thought of my daddy and I thought that daddy had the right idea. I sat down and was looking at the gun and there was a Bible sitting there. I thought that there is no possible way that the good Lord can forgive somebody like me, because I had been so full of hate. I had all the

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<sup>28</sup> <http://thislandpress.com/2013/08/29/watts-and-clary/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www1.cbn.com/700club/johnny-lee-clary-christ-and-ku-klux-klan>



violence and lived such a bad life, but I looked at that Bible and it fell open to Luke 15, the story of the prodigal son . . . I finally got on my knees and said, ‘God, my life is screwed up. God, I’m in a mess. I need your help.’”<sup>30</sup> Was it too late for God to forgive and take back his prodigal son? What could God do at this late stage? How could all the disasters be reversed?

“The next morning, he claims, his phone rang. It was a man [sic] he knew who ran a car dealership asking if Clary would be interested in coming to work for him. ‘I had just enough gas to get there,’ (Johnny Lee) Clary said. ‘By the time I left that day I had made \$700 in commission.’ Keeping a promise to God to go to church, Clary said he picked Tulsa’s Victory Christian Center out of the newspaper and went there. He said he almost turned around when he saw its integrated congregation. ‘You don’t say one prayer after being hateful and prejudiced all your life and then get up and say, ‘I love black people,’ and call up Michael Jackson and sing ‘We are the World’ with him,’ Clary said. ‘I still had all the prejudice. The same way I was taught to hate, I had to learn to love other people.’”<sup>31</sup>

Two years later, he returned to McAlester, “but found none ready to accept him . . . So, Johnny turned to the only person in his surroundings capable of helping him—Reverend Wade Watts. The Reverend welcomed his old nemesis with open arms and so it came to be that Johnny Lee Clary gave his first sermon in the very same church (now rebuilt) that he had burned down years ago, a lone white man [sic] now standing in front of a crowd of annoyed black men and women,”<sup>32</sup> with half of the congregation boycotting the service.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.joplinglobe.com/johnny-lee-clary-and-his-road-to-damascus/article\\_d11edc01-b32a-553a-8468-a0c941c63c11.html](http://www.joplinglobe.com/johnny-lee-clary-and-his-road-to-damascus/article_d11edc01-b32a-553a-8468-a0c941c63c11.html)

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.godyears.net/2017/08/the-redemption-of-ku-klux-klan-leader.html>

<sup>33</sup> <http://thislandpress.com/2013/08/29/watts-and-clary/>

On November 28, 2009, Johnny Lee Cleary was ordained a minister in the 6-million-member Church of God in Christ, the first Caucasian elder in the predominantly African American denomination.<sup>34</sup> “Not only has He (God) given me a good wife to stand by my side, but He’s given me good friends. He’s given me a good life here on earth. He’s given me hope, gave me the gift of love. Taught me what love’s all about. Isn’t that what God is? God is love. I’m not that mixed up kid looking for a family anymore. I’ve got a family. I’ve got a relationship with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup>

Is it ever too late to recognize one’s mistakes and helplessness and turn to God? Is any “evil” or disaster too difficult for the Lord to turn into “good”? (“Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is anything too difficult for Me?” Jeremiah 32:27). Does God not provide a way of escape for all to return to him? In love, God does not wish “for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). However, would they return to God or would they persist in their rebellion and bring disaster on themselves?

Israel wanted to have a human king rather than keep God as their king. “They (Israel) have rejected Me (God) from being king over them” (1 Samuel 8:7). Bowing to the people’s stubborn wishes, the prophet Samuel appointed Saul, a Benjamite, to be the king of Israel.

Sometime later, Saul went to war against the Philistines. He gathered his army to Gilgal and was told to wait seven days<sup>36</sup> for the prophet Samuel to come and offer sacrifices to the

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www1.cbn.com/700club/johnny-lee-clary-christ-and-ku-klux-klan>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> It is unclear when Samuel made the seven days’ appointment with Saul. Does it refer back to 1 Samuel 10:8 (“You shall wait seven days until I come to you”)? How much time had elapsed between that event and this Philistine battle? Did Samuel have a “standing instruction” for Saul to wait seven days at Gilgal for the sacrifices to be offered by Samuel before going to battle? Josephus wrote: “You are to come to Galgala when summoned by me that we may offer thanksgiving sacrifices to God for these things.” Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 6:57. “This, according to Josephus, was to be a standing rule for the observance of Saul while the prophet and he lived; that in every great crisis, such as a hostile incursion on the country, he should repair to Gilgal, where he was to

Lord. Seeing his army scattering away in fear, he chose to ignore Samuel's admonition and offered the burnt offering and the peace offerings himself, thus usurping the role of a priest. For that disobedient choice, his punishment came swiftly. "Your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after his own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you" (1 Samuel 13:14).

In the Lord's mercy, Saul was soon given another chance to redeem himself by following God's commands to the letter. He was told to "go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has and do not spare him" (1 Samuel 15:3). This was a punishment from the Lord since Amalek previously attacked Israel "while he (Israel) was coming up from Egypt" (1 Samuel 15:2). Saul again chose to disobey by sparing Agag, the Amalekite king, and keeping the best of the spoils.

Subsequently, Saul became jealous of David, the Lord's chosen future king, and tried to murder him without a cause. However, David respected Saul, the Lord's anointed, and refused to fight with him or kill him. In his paranoia, Saul ordered the execution of the priests and the whole population of Nob, supposedly for helping David escape (1 Samuel 22).

In a final showdown, the Philistines gathered their armies against Israel. "When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets" (1 Samuel 28:5-6). What was there left to be done? Was it time to repent and abdicate in favor of David? Or should one stubbornly continue in one's chosen path until the bitter end?

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remain seven days, to afford time for the tribes on both sides Jordan to assemble, and Samuel to reach it." *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*. [http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1\\_samuel/10-8.htm](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_samuel/10-8.htm)

Saul decided to consult the medium at En-dor, ignoring God's command about spiritists. "As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people" (Leviticus 20:6). And so it was on the field of battle. "Thus, Saul died with his three sons, his armor bearer, and all his men on that day together . . . and they cut off his head . . . and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan" (1 Samuel 31:6,9,10).

In this world, we can bring much evil into our lives by choosing a path that is not recommended or forbidden by the Lord. Like Saul's situation, the evils we wrought by our own actions may well be "gratuitous," with no redeeming qualities for ourselves,<sup>37</sup> although they may serve as a warning for others. The way of escape was provided throughout Saul's life (e.g., Saul's "temporary contrition" in 1 Samuel 15:24, 1 Samuel 24:16–21, 1 Samuel 26:21) without being fully embraced by the stubborn king.

The path of repentance was also provided to Johnny Lee Cleary who finally chose to humble himself before the Lord and turn back to him. The evils Johnny committed and the sufferings he endured were redeemed at the cross, resulting in peace and reconciliation between former enemies. All things may yet work together for good if we are willing to take God's way of escape and salvation!

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<sup>37</sup> "Both Adams and Stump have endorsed very strong sufferer-centered requirements on theodicy, ones which entail (perhaps with a few qualifications) that, as a result of divine providence, either (in Adams' case) no one is overall harmed by anything that happens to them or (in Stump's case) something overall harmful can happen to someone only if they freely fail to appropriate the goods their suffering made possible." Dustin Crummett, "Sufferer-Centered Requirements on Theodicy and All-Things-Considered Harms," 72. Such strong sufferer-centered requirements were not universally accepted. See William Hasker, "Light in the Darkness? Reflections on Eleonore Stump's Theodicy," 432–50. Also see Jeff Jordan, "Divine Love and Human Suffering," 169–78.

### 7.3.2 Moral Evils Coming from Other People's Actions.

Moral evils may also happen to us as a result of someone else's misdeeds.<sup>38</sup> We can be maimed by a drunk driver. Our identity can be stolen by a faceless computer hacker. We can be a target for criminals. Do we have any control over what happens to us in this world? Non-theists who do not believe in God's existence may rely only on themselves to ward off the dangers inherent in a precarious life on earth.<sup>39</sup> However, Christian believers can rest on God's promises of help and protection. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). "A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not approach you" (Psalm 91:7). "But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3).<sup>40</sup>

Michael was born in Brooklyn, New York, and was adopted as an infant. He followed in his father's footsteps and joined the "family's business." His father reasoned that since Michael wanted to be "on the street," he might as well give him "a proper introduction" to certain of his friends. But first there was an important matter to clear up . . . 'If you had to kill somebody, do

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<sup>38</sup> Moral evils may happen to us due to other human or non-human beings (James 5:6, 1 Peter 5:8).

<sup>39</sup> William Rowe said: "When God permits horrendous suffering for the sake of some good that is beyond our ken, God will make every effort to be consciously present to us during our period of suffering, will do his best to explain to us why he is permitting us to suffer, and will give us special assurances of his love and concern during the period of the suffering." William Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," 276. "Rowe argues that to suppose in regard to instances of terrible suffering that God exists and yet that the sufferers have no consciousness of his love or of the fact that there is some good which justifies their suffering is to assume unbelievable things." Michael Peterson, "Christian Theism and the Evidential Argument From Evil," 172. Should non-theists who deny God's existence *expect* God to clearly show himself to them during their periods of suffering? And if he does, would that not be considered "coercion" to believe in his existence? Thus, God may work through other "non-coercive" means to bring people back to him (e.g., Radio and TV broadcasts, religious tracts, evangelistic messages . . .).

<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Christians routinely testify of God's presence, comfort, and help during their trials and sufferings. See Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*. Also see Corrie Ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*.

you think you could do it?’ Michael thought for a moment. ‘If the circumstances were right,’ he said. ‘For the right reasons, I’d do it. Yeah.’”<sup>41</sup>

Convinced by Michael’s earnestness, his father “sent word back to New York and the process began . . . Michael had to do anything the mob asked of him.”<sup>42</sup> He was eventually caught and sentenced to prison. “I drew a 10-year prison sentence. I also had \$15 million restitution to pay off and I went off to do my time.”<sup>43</sup>

While he was in jail, “a prison guard pushed a Bible through a slot in his cell door . . . ‘It was the only night in my life I experienced hopelessness,’ he recalled. As he began to examine the character and the claims of Christ, he was born again. ‘That Bible, and reading about Jesus, really brought me through some very tough times.’”<sup>44</sup> “It’s almost as if God was with me in that 6 by 8 cell . . . I had nothing but enemies that night. The government was against me. My father betrayed me. The boss of my [mob] family had a contract against me. I’m sitting in that cell and I’m alone. It’s almost as if the Lord said, ‘I know you have enemies, but you come with me and I can take care of that.’”<sup>45</sup>

Michael Franzese decided to quit the mob, start a foundation for helping youth and become a motivational speaker. “That’s what I live for,” he said. “I’m in the ministry now and I am sharing the Gospel at any opportunity I can get.”<sup>46</sup> What about the mob and its contract on Michael’s life? “For years, the government tried to get him to turn on his former colleagues and

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/1991/02/john-gotti-joe-columbo-fbi-investigation-witness>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.kfvs12.com/story/12010179/special-report-michael-franzese-talks-about-quitting-the-mob>

<sup>43</sup> <http://blog.godreports.com/2014/08/former-new-york-mobster-captain-of-the-colombo-crime-family-found-christ-in-prison/>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.christianpost.com/news/former-prince-of-the-mafia-michael-franzese-headlines-evangelist-greg-lauries-social-harvest-124859/>

<sup>46</sup> <http://blog.godreports.com/2014/08/former-new-york-mobster-captain-of-the-colombo-crime-family-found-christ-in-prison/>

join the witness protection program. Michael refused and for years was forced to move his family when the threats became too real . . . He didn't return to New York for 12 years and only then with security. Franzese says he doesn't brag about getting out, he doesn't thumb his nose at the mob, and he doesn't underestimate it's [sic] capabilities. He wasn't 'mad at the mob. I just wanted out of the life.'"<sup>47</sup> "Remember, I am the only made man [sic], a caporegime, that I know of who has walked away from the life, publicly, not entered a witness protection program, and lived."<sup>48</sup> "Asked if he lives in fear of retribution from the mob, Franzese said: "I really don't worry about dying. But you know what? Who knows what's gonna happen tomorrow? I don't know."<sup>49</sup>

No one knows the future and God's ultimate plans. However, can we not say with Michael Franzese and the prophet Samuel, "Thus far the Lord has helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12)? "Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name. He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With a long life, I will satisfy him and let him see My salvation" (Psalm 91:14-16).

King Jehoshaphat of Judah was in a bind. He was on a state visit in Samaria with his in-law,<sup>50</sup> King Ahab of Israel<sup>51</sup>, when he was asked to join an expedition against Syria to retake the city of Ramoth-gilead. As "Ahab slaughtered many sheep and oxen for him and the people who

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.kfvs12.com/story/12010179/special-report-michael-franzese-talks-about-quitting-the-mob>

<sup>48</sup> <http://mashable.com/2014/01/08/mafia-boss-reddit-ama/#xYHac5RTGsqP>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/12/sports/baseball-from-captain-to-coach-ex-goodfella-s-new-life.html?src=pm>

<sup>50</sup> The historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics advocates a recognition of the prevailing cultural and political background of the events. Syria was the predominant power at that time and threatened the existence of both Israel and Judah. This was the reason for a pact between Jehoshaphat and Ahab. Jehoshaphat's son married Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, an accepted practice in those days to "seal" an alliance. "This manner of linking kingdoms by the bond of marriage was common in the ancient world." <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/2-chronicles-18/>

<sup>51</sup> King Ahab was mentioned in the "Monolith Inscription of Shalmaneser III that was found in 1861 at Kurkh on the Tigris River in southeastern Turkey... 2000 chariots, and 10,000 soldiers belonging to Ahab, the Israelite." <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2012/05/22/Israelite-Kings-in-Assyrian-Inscriptions.aspx>

were with him” (2 Chronicles 18:2), it would have been awkward for him as a guest (and an in-law and ally) to refuse the host’s request for support. Nevertheless, he could ask for some time to consider such a weighty decision as an all-out war with Syria, a great power at that time.

However, rather than deferring his decision until later (e.g., by citing the need to confer with his generals in Jerusalem and/or the necessity for the High Priest to seek the Lord’s opinion on the matter), he decided to go to war as an ally of the wicked Ahab. “I am as you are, and my people as your people, and we will be with you in the battle” (2 Chronicles 18:3). Surprisingly, he then voiced the request, “Please inquire first for the word of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 18:4). “Jehoshaphat first made up his mind without asking God, and then thought that it might be well to get some kind of varnish of a religious sanction for his decision.”<sup>52</sup>

Having already obtained Jehoshaphat’s solemn promise of alliance, Ahab was more than happy to oblige him with 400 prophets, an “over the top” display of power and resources. The prophetic word was unanimous: “Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king” (2 Chronicles 18:5). Somehow, Jehoshaphat was not convinced that they were true prophets of the Lord. Ahab reluctantly sent for the prophet Micaiah who prophesied utter defeat for the combined armies and the death of the king.

Thus, Jehoshaphat was given a “way of escape.” He could delay the expedition against Syria, beg leave of Ahab, and return to the temple in Jerusalem to get confirmation from the Lord through the High Priest. He could take back his promise to go with Ahab since defeat was prophesied by Micaiah. Or he could just ignore God’s word and proceed to battle. Unwisely, he spurned the way of escape, chose the third option and went to Ramoth-gilead with Ahab.

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<sup>52</sup> *MacLaren’s Expositions*. [http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1\\_kings/22-7.htm](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_kings/22-7.htm)



Nevertheless, Micaiah's prophecies did not fall on totally deaf ears. Ahab took extra precautions and disguised himself so as not to be a target for the Syrians. However, he told Jehoshaphat to wear his royal robes (and act as a lure?). Why Jehoshaphat would agree to such a scheme is hard to fathom! After all, two people could play the same game and have soldiers wear the royal robes and pretend to be King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat.

As suspected, "the king of Syria had commanded the captains of his chariots, saying, 'Do not fight with small or great, but with the king of Israel alone'" (2 Chronicles 18:30). "It was one of the recognized objectives in the assault plan of battles in open terrain, where the rival kings took part, to try to kill the enemy king, and thereby to break the morale and the offensive spirit of the adversary forces."<sup>53</sup> Seeing Jehoshaphat in royal robes, the Syrian chariot captains mistook him for King Ahab and converged to kill him. Belatedly, Jehoshaphat perceived his imminent danger and cried out for help!

Even though he made poor decisions to ally himself with Ahab by marriage (Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram married Ahab and Jezebel's daughter Athaliah, 2 Chronicles 21:6), and go with Ahab against the Syrians at Ramoth-gilead, Jehoshaphat was overall a good king in the Lord's eyes. "But there is some good in you, for you have removed the Asheroth from the land and you have set your heart to seek God" (2 Chronicles 19:3). Would the merciful Lord forgive and protect the wayward king from the enemies who wanted to end his life? Or would he let the trapped king fend for himself and suffer the evil consequences of his own foolish decisions despite his cries for assistance? Can we count on God to protect us from other people's evil actions when we call on him for help in our distress?

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<sup>53</sup> Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands: In the Light of Archeological Discovery*, Vol. 2, 312.

“But Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him, and God diverted them from him” (2 Chronicles 18:31). Jehoshaphat survived but Ahab was killed when “a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel in a joint of the armor” (2 Chronicles 18:33). When Jehoshaphat escaped to Jerusalem, he was severely rebuked by the Lord through the prophet Jehu for allying himself with Ahab. “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord and so bring wrath on yourself from the Lord?” (2 Chronicles 19:2).

Moral evils can come to believers due to the actions of others. However, “to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose,” God promises that “all things will work together for good” (Romans 8:28). Michael Franzese is still alive and safe from the vengeful Mafia. King Jehoshaphat escaped from certain death thanks to God’s protection, despite Ahab’s evil scheme to use him as a lure. Joseph was delivered by God from slavery and promoted as the second ruler in Egypt despite his brothers’ wicked action. “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). God does *not* use “tough-love” with the faithful children who love and obey him.<sup>54</sup> Rather, he cherishes and protects them from all harms (i.e., evils without any redeeming goods) from other people’s actions.<sup>55</sup> “For you have made the Lord, my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent” (Psalm 91:9–10). God encourages his people to persevere in the midst of their trials as they must live for a (short) time in this fallen world. “In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). God assures them of his concern, continuous presence, and help. “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. So,

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<sup>54</sup> However, God does use “tough-love” with his children who stubbornly continue to disobey him and insist on going their own way.

<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, true moral evils may happen to believers if they are out of fellowship with God and persist in disobedience. Romans 8:28 is conditional and applies “to those who love God.”

we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5–6 NIV).

### 7.3.3 Moral “Evils” Coming from God’s Hands.

#### 7.3.3.1 Moral “Evil” for the Edification of Believers.

As we have said, God does use “evil” as a tool in the lives of believers. God’s purposes may include edification, discipline, deterrence, rehabilitation, or a combination of these and the other sources of evil (from oneself and from others).<sup>56</sup> Since the “evils” from God (e.g., money problems, work issues) have good purposes for believers, they are not true evils. After all, God promises believers, “No evil will befall you” (Psalm 91:10) and “The Lord will protect you from all evil” (Psalm 121:7). Obviously, God’s goal is not to destroy the believers. God’s word and action through the “evil” events are “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Believers who respond correctly to the “evil” experiences will become stronger (i.e., “trained in righteousness”). Those who do not may suffer shipwreck.

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<sup>56</sup> For example, God used Assyria to chastise Israel for its disobedience. However, Assyria chose to satisfy its own desires in destroying the Israelites. The evil was meant by God for good (e.g., discipline, rehabilitation and future deterrence). Assyria meant it for evil (e.g., pride of victory and spoils of war). Israel also brought evil upon itself by its unfaithfulness. Thus, all three parties have a hand in the occurrence of the evil. “God may justly punish those who do the things that he hath commanded them to do, if they do them not in that manner in which he directs, or, if what they do be not done in obedience to his command, but for the satisfaction of their own lusts: which was the case, as with the king of Assyria, Isaiah 10:5–7.” *Benson Commentary*.  
<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/jeremiah/50-18.htm>

Job was “blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil” (Job 1:1). Yet, as we all know, God allowed “evil”<sup>57</sup> (or used “evil” as a tool) in Job’s life. Job lost all his children, all his possessions, and even his own health. What was God’s purpose behind all these “evils”? What did God want Job to learn through this trial?

At the end of the account, “Job answered the Lord, and said, ‘I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted’” (Job 42:2). Following his “evil” experience, Job realized that God is sovereign and omnipotent “not only by power, (for that he always thought,) but also by right; about which he had in some sort doubted and disputed. It is a maxim in law, that a man [sic] can only do that which he hath a right to do.”<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, Job acknowledged that “I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:3). Job’s purported understanding of God’s ways was erroneous (e.g., “evils” should not happen to innocent, faithful believers. “According to Your knowledge, I am indeed not guilty, yet there is no deliverance from Your hand,” Job 10:7). “It is no uncommon thing for even good people to be brought to see that they have spoken presumptuously of God, and have engaged, in discussions and ventured to pronounce opinions on matters pertaining to the divine administration, that were wholly beyond their comprehension.”<sup>59</sup>

Concerning his knowledge of God, Job affirms: “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you” (Job 42:5). Thus, Job’s life has been greatly enriched by a fuller knowledge of God. “Job’s former knowledge of God, though he had prided himself upon it

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<sup>57</sup> God allowed Satan to bring “evil” in Job’s life. “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him” (Job 1:12). Later, God even allowed Satan to hurt Job physically, yet not to the point of killing him. “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life” (Job 2: 6).

<sup>58</sup> *Matthew Poole’s Commentary*. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/job/42-2.htm>

<sup>59</sup> *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/job/42-3.htm>

(chapters 12–13), seems to him now only such a knowledge as one gets by hearsay, confused and defective. His present knowledge is that of eyesight, immediate and full.”<sup>60</sup>

Finally, Job learned that “his attitude towards God (is) one unbefitting a creature.”<sup>61</sup> “Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). “We all err in the same way in which Job did. We reason about God with irreverence; we speak of his government as if we could comprehend it; we discourse of him as if he were an equal; and when we come to have any just views of him, we see that there has been much improper boldness, much self-confidence, much irreverence of thought and manner, in our estimation of the divine wisdom and plans. The bitter experience of Job should lead us to the utmost carefulness in the manner in which we speak of our Maker.”<sup>62</sup> Were Job’s “evil” experiences true evils or were they blessings? To dispel any doubt, “the Lord restored the fortunes of Job . . . and the Lord increased all that Job had twofold” (Job 42:10).

In Job’s case, God’s goal of edification was accomplished as the God-fearing Job was blessed by a deeper knowledge of God and a more intimate relationship with him (i.e., “now my eye sees you”). God does use “evil” as a tool in believers’ lives for the purpose of edification, to bring them closer to their creator<sup>63</sup> and behave more like him in holiness. Whether we respond quickly (e.g., Job), slowly (e.g., Samson)<sup>64</sup> or not at all (e.g., King Saul) to the “evils” in our lives is up to us, for God does not force anyone to have a love relationship with him. The prodigal son was free to stay or leave. The choice was his and his alone since forced love is no

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<sup>60</sup> *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/job/42-5.htm>

<sup>61</sup> *Pulpit Commentary*. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/job/42-6.htm>

<sup>62</sup> *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/job/42-6.htm>

<sup>63</sup> “For the Christian, in particular, occasions of enduring rejection, pain and loss can be opportunities for identification with the person of Jesus Christ. Intimacy with Christ gained through suffering provides deeper appreciation of his passion.” Laura Ekstrom, “A Christian Theodicy,” 270.

<sup>64</sup> Judges 13–16.

love at all! The theologian Joseph Bellamy wrote: “Love cannot be forced. Forced love is no love . . . Most certainly, that knowledge of God which is necessary to lay a foundation of genuine love to him, implies not only right apprehensions of what He is, but also a sense of his glory and beauty.”<sup>65</sup>

#### 7.3.3.2 Moral “Evil” for the Discipline of Believers.

Believers (and non-believers) cannot expect to sin and disobey God with impunity. God as a father is responsible for correcting and disciplining his children. “God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?” (Hebrews 12:7). Nevertheless, the purpose of punishment and discipline (at least for believers) is not to destroy but to teach and correct for the ultimate good of growth and maturity. “When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11). Discipline is meant for good not for evil, for God does not purposefully bring true evil in the lives of his followers. “He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

However, the discipline may not fulfill its desired goal of bringing believers to repentance. God, in his sovereignty, gave them a choice to submit or to spurn his counsel. No one is coerced to love and obey God. Believers (as well as non-believers) are free to follow God or reject Him. The believers’ discipline may not “work together for good” as the promise of Romans 8:28 is conditional and applicable only “to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” “The Christian is made a better man [sic] by receiving afflictions as

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<sup>65</sup> Joseph Bellamy. *True Religion Delineated*, 4.

they should be received, and by desiring that they should accomplish the purpose for which they are sent; the sinner is made more hardened by resisting them, and refusing to submit to their obvious intention and design.”<sup>66</sup>

Due to King Solomon’s unfaithfulness to the Lord in worshiping other gods (e.g., Ashtoreth, Milcom, and Chemosh), God split his kingdom in two, giving the northern part (i.e., the kingdom of Israel) to Jeroboam. God also gave Jeroboam a generous conditional promise. “If you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight . . . then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David” (1 Kings 11:38). Thus, Jeroboam’s dynasty could be equal to David’s on the condition of loyalty and obedience to God.

However, when Jeroboam became king, he decided to worship two golden calves instead of the Lord. “Behold your gods (the two golden calves), O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28). The Lord’s discipline was swift. Jeroboam’s altar for the golden calf in Bethel was split apart and Jeroboam’s hand “dried up so that he could not draw it back to himself” (1 Kings 13:4). Jeroboam asked the Lord’s prophet to pray for him, and God, in his mercy, healed Jeroboam’s hand.

Did the warning and discipline accomplish their desired goal of bringing Jeroboam back to God? “After this event Jeroboam did not return from his evil way, but again he made priests of the high places from among all the people; any who would, he ordained, to be priests of the high places. And this event became sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to blot it out and destroy it from off the face of the earth” (1 Kings 13:33–34).

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<sup>66</sup> *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/romans/8-28.htm>

In Jeroboam's case, the Lord's discipline did not fulfill its desired purpose of bringing the king to repentance. In his sovereignty, God gave Jeroboam a choice to obey or disobey. Sadly, the stubborn monarch persisted in his rebellion and would have to live with the dire consequences.

King David decided to have a census to number his standing army. "He numbered them, not by direction from God, but out of mere curiosity, and pride, and vain-glory; accompanied with a confidence in the numbers of his people. All which sins were so manifest, that not only God saw them, but even Joab and the captains of the host."<sup>67</sup> In his mercy, God provided David with a way of escape through the counsel of his general Joab and the commanders of the army. "Now may the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" (2 Samuel 24:3). However, David would not listen and insisted that the census be done.

The Lord's punishment was declared through the prophet Gad. David must choose between three years of famine, three months of being pursued by his enemies, or three days of pestilence (1 Chronicles 21:12).<sup>68</sup> David "said to God, 'I have sinned greatly, in that I have done this thing. But now, please take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly'" (1 Chronicles 21:8). However, even in repentance, the Lord's punishment/decreed still stood.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Benson Commentary*. [http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2\\_samuel/24-2.htm](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_samuel/24-2.htm)

<sup>68</sup> 2 Samuel 24:13 mentioned seven years of famine rather than the 3 years of famine of 1 Chronicles 21:12. This is probably due to a scribal error (7,3,3 rather than 3,3,3).

<sup>69</sup> We argued that God's decree, once pronounced, cannot be revoked. "God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind" (Numbers 23:19 NIV). Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*.



In David's case, the Lord's discipline and punishment fulfilled their desired goal of bringing David back to God. David repented and did not order any further census of the people. "Then he died in a ripe old age, full of days, riches and honor" (1 Chronicles 29:28).

Believers need to remember that the gracious and merciful Lord only resort to discipline *after* fair (and often repeated) warnings. The ways of escape were provided to God's people (e.g., to Jeroboam and to David). However, if they stubbornly insist on their destructive ways, discipline is sure to come since "whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6).

#### 7.3.3.3 Moral "Evil" for the Deterrence of Believers.

Besides the purposes of edification and discipline, God may allow "evils" to deter believers from sinning.

For example, Ananias and Sapphira decided to sell a piece of property and give the proceeds to the church. However, they agreed together not to donate the full amount while pretending otherwise. Somehow, Peter found out about the deceitful scheme. "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3). God's judgment was swift as "Ananias fell down and breathed his last." Three hours later, Sapphira "came in, not knowing what had happened." Questioned by Peter (and allowed an opportunity to "come clean"), she lied and said, "Yes, that was the price." For that, she also "breathed her last." "And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things" (Acts 5:11). "To produce such a fear as should deter others from a like offence was

God's intention in this miracle of punishment.”<sup>70</sup> From this experience, the church learned that lying to the Holy Spirit (i.e., God) is a capital offense.

According to Josephus, King Herod Agrippa (an Edomite) “put on a garment made wholly of silver, of a truly wonderful texture, and came into the theater early in the morning. There the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays, shone out in a wonderful manner, and was so resplendent as to spread awe over those that looked intently upon him. Presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good) that he was a god.”<sup>71</sup> “The people kept crying out, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’ And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12:22–23). This serves as a deterrence for all who may consider usurping God's unique position as the creator and sustainer of the universe!<sup>72</sup>

#### 7.3.3.4 Moral “Evil” for the Rehabilitation of Believers.

God also uses “evil” to rehabilitate his children. Believers who are going astray can expect strong corrective measures to bring them back to usefulness in the kingdom.

During the Last Supper, “there arose also a dispute among them (Jesus' disciples) as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest” (Luke 22:24). After a rebuke and an admonition for them to be servants (rather than lords), Jesus revealed that “Satan has demanded permission

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<sup>70</sup> *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/5-11.htm>

<sup>71</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 19.8.2.

<sup>72</sup> Some well-known people claimed to be God (e.g., Sun Myung Moon, Jim Jones and Major Divine, all now dead). <http://www.monitor.co.ug/artsculture/Reviews/PEOPLE-WHO-CLAIMED-TO-BE-GOD/691232-2227784-8ipxpw/index.html>

to sift you (plural, meaning all the disciples) like wheat” (Luke 22:31). And who was the “weakest link”<sup>73</sup> among the disciples?<sup>74</sup> Who needed Jesus’ prayer and protection the most? “I have prayed for you (singular, meaning Peter) that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:32). Nevertheless, Peter boastfully claimed, “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!” (and was therefore the greatest of all the disciples?). To disabuse him of that notion and remediate his character flaw, Jesus decreed,<sup>75</sup> “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me” (Luke 22:34). Was Peter convinced that Jesus was correct in his assessment of Peter’s character?

After the Last Supper, Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives. “And Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away’” (Mark 14:27). What was Peter’s response? “Even though all may fall away, yet I will not” (Mark 14:29). Jesus further decreed a second set of three denials (a stronger remedial measure), “Truly I say to you, that you yourself this very night, before a cock crows twice, shall three times deny Me” (Mark 14:30). “But Peter kept saying insistently, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny you!’” (Mark 14:31).

Can we find six denials in the Scriptures? At Annas’ house (John 18:13), Peter was questioned by a doorkeeper and denied Christ (denial #1, John 18:17). Standing by a charcoal fire, Peter was challenged by some “slaves and officers” and denied Christ (denial #2, John 18:18, 25). Peter was then confronted by a relative of Malchus (Peter cut off Malchus’ ear during

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<sup>73</sup> Peter was the only one among the twelve disciples to be called “Satan” by Jesus (Matthew 16:23). Jesus called Judas the traitor, “friend” (Matthew 26:50).

<sup>74</sup> Only eleven disciples remained in the Upper Room since Judas already left (John 13:30). Peter’s denials were foretold by Christ in John 13:38 and Luke 22:34.

<sup>75</sup> Obviously, Peter was not given the choice to deny or not to deny Christ. God, in his sovereignty, may decree certain events and may not give people a free will decision in the matter.

a fight in the Garden of Gethsemane) and denied Christ (denial #3, John 18:27), “and immediately a cock crowed” (John 18:27).

Subsequently, Peter was sitting by a fire in Caiaphas’ courtyard when he was accosted by a servant-girl and denied Christ (denial #4, Matthew 26:70, Mark 14:67 and Luke 22:56). He was then approached by another servant-girl at the gateway and denied Christ (denial #5, Matthew 26:71-72, Mark 14:69-70 and Luke 22:58). Finally, he was called out by some bystanders and denied Christ (denial # 6, Matthew 26:73–74, Mark 14:70–71 and Luke 22:59–60). “And immediately, a cock crowed a second time” (Mark 14:72).

The remedial measures appeared to work for “the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, ‘Before a cock crows today, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61–62). The “evils” (i.e., denials and betrayals) used by God as “tools” to rehabilitate Peter were meant for good as Peter was given the special privilege of being God’s under-shepherd (i.e., “Shepherd My sheep,” John 21:16).

In summary, moral evils can come into believers’ lives from their own actions, from other people’s actions, from God for the purpose of edification, discipline, deterrence or rehabilitation and from a combination of these sources.<sup>76</sup> However, for believers, God promises a “way of escape” in times of trials and temptations so that they are not “doomed” to sin and fall to moral evils. God also affirms that “all things work together for good to those who love God,” thus negating the harmful effects of other people’s actions in the believers’ lives (i.e., “you

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<sup>76</sup> This list is not exhaustive. There may be other reasons for evils (moral and natural) in our lives. God may also have other purposes for the evils we encounter.

meant evil against me, but God meant it for good,” Genesis 50:20). Furthermore, believers can rest assured that the “evils” allowed by God into their lives (e.g., trials, betrayals) serve a good purpose (i.e., edification, discipline, deterrence, or rehabilitation) *if* they are taken with the right spirit of submission and acceptance.

For non-believers, moral evils brought into their lives by their own actions, other people’s actions, or God may serve the purpose of bringing them back to their creator in the “tough-love” approach (combined with the Holy Spirit’s prompting and the Church’s extensive evangelistic efforts). Whether this goal is ever achieved is up to them and them alone!

Besides moral evils, humans are also plagued by natural evils. Where do they come from and is God involved in the process?

#### **7.4 The Sources of Natural Evils in Believers’ Lives.**

Natural evils are only considered evil when they cause human or animal sufferings. An earthquake in the middle of the ocean causing no human or animal deaths is not considered evil. Lightning striking an open field without causing a fire or an injury is not a natural evil.

Natural evils (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes, diseases) can come from several sources and can be “attached” or “unattached” to moral evils.<sup>77</sup>

##### *7.4.1 Natural Evils Coming from One’s Own Actions.*

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<sup>77</sup> John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 146.

Natural evils can come in the lives of believers (and non-believers) as a result of their unwise actions. When we make decisions without consulting the omniscient God (or ignoring his commandments and our God-given common sense), we bring unnecessary troubles on ourselves.

The November 1, 1755 Lisbon earthquake on All Saints' Day with its subsequent fires and a twelve-meter-high tsunami brought a death toll of sixty thousand people (much of the population who attended church services on All Saints' Day perished when the churches collapsed). The 8.5 to 9 Richter scale<sup>78</sup> convulsion destroyed 85% of the buildings in the Portugal capital. This cataclysm prompted Francois-Marie Arouet (pen name Voltaire) to write *Poème sur le Désastre de Lisbonne* (Poem on the Lisbon Disaster),<sup>79</sup> decrying Gottfried Leibniz's view that our world is actually "the best of all possible worlds" despite all its evils.<sup>80</sup> "This event was a turning point in intellectual history because rationalist religious systems supporting unqualified optimism were seen by many in a different light."<sup>81</sup>

Was God to blame for this tragedy? The historian Mark Molesky wrote: "Once again in its history, the West found in its conceptions of God, Nature, and Providence under a barrage of scrutiny. And many, as a result, began to ask the all-important yet profoundly disturbing question of theodicy: How could a Creator, both beneficent and all-powerful, have permitted such a catastrophe?"<sup>82</sup> However, Jean-Jacques Rousseau observed: "It was hardly nature who assembled there twenty-thousand houses of six or seven stories. If the residents of this large city

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<sup>78</sup> The strongest earthquake ever measured was a 9.5 Richter scale tremor in Chile on May 22, 1960. <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/world/worlds-biggest-recorded-earthquakes/news-story/8e102c4cb636b583c668f36c4ebac9a4?sv=3fc46d2b91f93160982223996c27fe39>

<sup>79</sup> Voltaire, *Poèmes Sur Le Désastre de Lisbonne, Et Sur La Loi Naturelle, Avec Des Préfaces*.

<sup>80</sup> "I have gone even farther, in the work, and have even proved that this universe must be in reality better than every other possible universe." Gottfried Leibniz, *Leibniz Selections*, 96.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Peterson, "Introduction," 2.

<sup>82</sup> Mark Molesky, *This Gulf of Fire: The Great Lisbon Earthquake, or Apocalypse in the Age of Science and Reason*, 19.

had been more evenly dispersed and less densely housed, the losses would have been fewer or perhaps none at all.”<sup>83</sup>

Have humans learned much from this disaster? According to scientists, “several large historical earthquakes, including the 1531 M7, the 1909 M6.3 and possibly the 1344 M6, occurred on the LTV (Lower Targus valley passing through Lisbon), causing significant damage in the Lisbon area. Furthermore, one study proposed that the offshore 1755 earthquake actually triggered an onshore rupture on the LTV fault. Thus, the return period of magnitude 6 to 7 earthquakes along the LTV could be as short as 150 to 200 years, making Lisbon the highest risk area in Portugal.”<sup>84</sup>

How prepared is Lisbon for the next devastating earthquake? “This seismic source zone, with its proximity to Lisbon, the large number of old masonry buildings and a fraction of reinforced concrete frames designed with limited lateral resistance, presents the most significant potential for large loss earthquakes in Portugal.”<sup>85</sup> However, people are still blithely living and building in this disaster-prone area despite all the warnings. The population of Lisbon and its surrounding areas is estimated in 2017 to be 2,800,000 people.<sup>86</sup> Mourad Bezzegoud, the lead scientist on earthquakes at Evora University in Portugal, declared: “I am trying to say we are very close to an earthquake of the same magnitude of the one registered in 1755. I cannot say when and how it will manifest. It could repeat itself in various forms, even with two or three earthquakes of different intensities.”<sup>87</sup> At 7:44 am on August 17, 2017, an earthquake measuring

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<sup>83</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Rousseau to Voltaire, 18 August 1756,” 37–50.

<sup>84</sup> Guillermo Franco and Bingming Shen-Tu, “From 1755 to Today—Reassessing Lisbon’s Earthquake Risk.” <https://www.air-worldwide.com/publications/air-currents/from-1755-to-today-reassessing-lisbons-earthquake-risk/>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/lisbon-population>

<sup>87</sup> <http://portugalresident.com/new-%E2%80%9Cearthquake-probability%E2%80%9D-map-highlights-risks-of-lisbon-and-algarve>

4.3 on the Richter scale shook Lisbon and its surrounding areas. “Its epicentre was 23 miles north-west of Lisbon and the estimated population in the area which felt the tremors is around 3.5 million people.”<sup>88</sup> Is God to blame for the next devastating Lisbon earthquake? Or were ample warnings already given to believers as well as non-believers?

Is God responsible for the 160,000 deaths<sup>89</sup> of the 2010 Haiti earthquake? “One widely discussed example was a comparison of the Haiti and New Zealand earthquakes of 2010. These two events share significant similarities in terms of the power of the earthquake and their epicentres being in the vicinity of major population centres but had very different outcomes in terms of deaths: at least 100,000 people died in Haiti and nobody died in New Zealand. At least part of the explanation for this difference is attributed to different levels of disaster preparedness and resilience.”<sup>90</sup> Who is to blame for the Haiti death toll? God or humans?

Besides the natural evils of earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis, what can we say about the natural evils of rampant diseases in this world? Why do they occur and cause untold pains and sufferings on inhabitants of this earth?

What is the world’s biggest killer? It is not war, genocides, famines, epidemics, or accidents. It is what we call “lifestyle diseases,”<sup>91</sup> illnesses (e.g., liver cirrhosis, lung cancer, heart attacks, stroke) resulting from the use (or abuse) of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, “junk foods,” and the lack of exercise. “Lifestyle diseases characterize those diseases whose occurrence is primarily based on the daily habits of people and are a result of an inappropriate relationship of

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<sup>88</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/portugal-earthquake-lisbon-magnitude-seismic-richter-scale-institute-sea-atmosphere-epicentre-a7897891.html>

<sup>89</sup> Kolbe et al., “Mortality, Crime and Access to Basic Needs Before and After the Haiti Earthquake: A Random Survey of Port-au-Prince Households,” 281–97.

<sup>90</sup> Vilijus Dranseika, “Moral Responsibility for Natural Disasters,” 73–79.

<sup>91</sup> Alison Caldwell, “‘Lifestyle’ diseases the world’s biggest killer.” <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-04-28/lifestyle-diseases-the-worlds-biggest-killer/2695712>



people with their environment.”<sup>92</sup> “Lifestyle diseases are responsible for 63 per cent of global deaths based on WHO's (World Health Organization’s) estimates for 2008.”<sup>93</sup> “By 2030, the proportion of total global deaths due to chronic diseases is expected to increase to 70 per cent and the global burden of disease to 56 per cent.”<sup>94</sup> In the United States, “chronic diseases and conditions--such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, type 2 diabetes, obesity and arthritis—are among the most common, costly, and preventable of all health problems. As of 2012, about half of all adults—117 million people—had one or more chronic health conditions . . . Seven of the top 10 causes of death in 2014 were chronic diseases . . . Obesity is a serious health concern. During 2011-2014, more than one-third of adults (36%), or about 84 million people, were obese . . . About one in six youths (17%) aged 2 to 19 years was obese.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, natural evils are often brought on by our own actions as we continually ignore natural biological warnings as well as scientific dire predictions concerning our “inappropriate relationship with our environment.”

Who is to be blamed for such impending disasters? People or God?

Should humans not use their God-given common sense to avoid natural evils (at least as much as possible)? Should they not learn from their previous experiences with the environment and steer clear of obviously dangerous situations?

The apostle Paul and some other prisoners were taken to Rome to face Caesar’s judgment. After stops at Sidon, Cyprus, and Myra, the centurion Julius in charge of the prisoners

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<sup>92</sup> Mukesh Sharma and P. K. Majumdar, “Occupational lifestyle diseases: An emerging issue,” 109–12.

<sup>93</sup> Alison Caldwell, “‘Lifestyle’ diseases the world’s biggest killer.” <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-04-28/lifestyle-diseases-the-worlds-biggest-killer/2695712>

<sup>94</sup> Fatma Al-Maskari, “Lifestyle Diseases: An Economic Burden on the Health Services.” <https://unchronicle.un.org/article/lifestyle-diseases-economic-burden-health-services>

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/overview/index.htm>

found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy. They “sailed slowly for a good many days and with difficulty” arrived at Fair Havens in Crete (Acts 27).

“Fair Havens would have been the westernmost harbor Paul’s ship could reach while staying under the lee of Crete. Beyond the cape (Matala) west of Fair Havens, the shore turns north dramatically, exposing the ship to the winds they were trying to avoid. The fact that the harbor was ‘unsuitable to winter in’ was confirmed in 1853 by an explorer named Captain T. A. B. Spratt, who observed that winter winds from the east and southeast blow right into the harbor. But the decision to make a run for (the Cretan harbor) Phoenix was not wise. Vegetius (4th century AD) records that sailing in the Mediterranean after September 15th was dangerous, and after November 11th was impossible (De re militari 4.39).”<sup>96</sup>

As “considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast (i.e., the Day of Atonement on October 5, AD 59)<sup>97</sup> was already over,”<sup>98</sup> Paul admonished his fellow travelers to desist from their perilous plan to sail to Phoenix, a forty-mile journey on open sea around Cape Matala, exposing the ship to violent winds (i.e., the Euraquilo) sweeping down from 8056 feet Mount Ida. “But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship, than what was being said by Paul” (Acts 27:11). Thus, “they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, close inshore”<sup>99</sup> past Cape Matala and the protection of the lee of Crete.

The result was to be expected. They were caught by the Euraquilo, driven westward into the open sea toward the island of Malta (a distance of more than 5177 miles),<sup>100</sup> lost their cargo,

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<sup>96</sup> <https://www.bibleplaces.com/fair-havens/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Acts/Caesarea-Crete-Storm>

<sup>98</sup> Acts 27:9.

<sup>99</sup> Acts 27:13.

<sup>100</sup> <http://distancebetween2.com/crete/malta>

their ship and only saved their lives by the grace of God. Was God to blame for their disaster? Or was he to be praised for sparing their lives despite their lack of common sense?

People (believers and non-believers) are quick to blame God for their unwise decisions. Natural evils are often the results of humans blithely ignoring the natural laws of the planet (e.g., building a house in a seismic fault zone, overeating, and lack of exercise), abusing the environment (e.g., extensive release of greenhouse gases and pollution of the air and water) or intentionally poisoning the earth (e.g., deforestation with Agent Orange).<sup>101</sup>

#### *7.4.2 Natural Evils Coming from Other People's Actions.*

Natural evils can also come in the lives of believers (and non-believers) as a result of other people's actions or inactions.<sup>102</sup>

Houses are routinely built on flood plains by greedy developers and sold to unsuspecting customers. "Floodplains are increasingly becoming areas of contention as the ever-expanding forces of urbanization and development profiteering place more buildings in harm's way. One overall difficulty with the situation is that it is floodplain developers (meaning the entire development mechanism: builders, bankers, realtors, etc.) need only meet certain minimum requirements. These requirements (for building in the so-called '100-year floodplain') are interpreted at the local level and with great variation from place to place and are often entirely irrespective of the specific regional flood risks of the area. After the building is developed and

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<sup>101</sup> Jeanne Stellman and Steven Stellman, "Agent Orange During the Vietnam War: The Lingering Issue of Its Civilian and Military Health Impact," 726–28.

<sup>102</sup> Natural evils may happen to us due to other human or non-human beings (Job 1:19).

sold (and the mortgages and tax profit streams are established), the real risks are passed on the building owner.”<sup>103</sup>

Hurricane Harvey, the costliest in US history, inflicted 125 billion dollars in damage to metropolitan Houston and caused 91 fatalities in 2017. Did Houstonian builders learn their lesson and give up future developments in flood plains? “In the months following Hurricane Harvey, Houstonians face an important decision: respect the floodplain and stop building homes wherever or continue to ignore the lessons taught by countless flood events and build more homes in the most vulnerable areas of town. The latest example of the city attempting to do the latter is in western Houston, where plans have been drawn up to build single-family homes on the site of the Pine Crest Golf Club, which was recently closed, according to the Houston Chronicle. Harris County Flood Control District maps show the entire 151-acre plot of land is located in a flood plain, the report added. If completed, the community will be named Spring Brook Village and will house up to 800 new residents.”<sup>104</sup>

Hurricane Katrina in 2005 caused 108 billion dollars in damage and 1836 fatalities. Breaches in the New Orleans levees were responsible for most of the deaths and destructions in the city. However, were the levees’ failures unexpected? “For years, Louisiana officials have been warning of the tragedy that could result if the levees surrounding New Orleans were breached. Every year, they begged for more money to strengthen the walls that kept the waters of Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River from overwhelming the Big Easy—and almost

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<sup>103</sup> [http://floodsafety.com/national/writings/risk\\_profit.html](http://floodsafety.com/national/writings/risk_profit.html)

<sup>104</sup> Sean Breslin, “Houston Might Continue Building Homes on Floodplains Two Months After Hurricane Harvey Flooded All the Floodplains.” <https://weather.com/news/news/2017-11-01-houston-hurricane-harvey-rebuilding-floodplains>

every single year for the last decade, they were turned down.”<sup>105</sup> Can such natural evil be blamed on God?

We have all heard about the deformities that the Zika virus can cause in babies. However, there is a more prevalent “newborn illness that nobody is talking about—and it’s not Zika.”<sup>106</sup> It is the Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), babies born addicted to opioids or other drugs (e.g., “crack baby”). “Nationally, the rate of American children born with neonatal abstinence syndrome, a set of symptoms experienced by babies exposed to drugs in the womb, has quadrupled over the past 15 years.”<sup>107</sup> “Infants with NAS experienced serious medical complications, with 97.1% being admitted to an intensive care unit, and had prolonged hospital stays, with a mean duration of 26.1 days.”<sup>108</sup> “While we don’t yet know all the long term consequences of NAS, it can include lifelong cognitive and psychological trauma, developmental delays, learning disabilities, and heightened susceptibility to addiction. And the costs to the health care system are astronomical.”<sup>109</sup> Who is to blame for this disease (i.e., “attached” natural evil) befalling innocent babies? Is God responsible for pregnant women taking drugs?

The apostle Paul, as a prisoner, warned the centurion Julius about the danger of sea travel late in the season (in October). “But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship, than what was being said by Paul” (Acts 27:11). Probably, Julius was swayed

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<sup>105</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/HurricaneKatrina/story?id=1089398>

<sup>106</sup> Bill Frist, “The Newborn Illness That Nobody Is Talking About - And It's Not Zika.” <https://www.forbes.com/sites/billfrist/2016/09/29/the-newborn-illness-that-is-costing-our-health-care-system-billions-and-its-not-zika/#7e74379f3f5f>

<sup>107</sup> Hannah Rappleye, Rich McHugh and Ronan Farrow, “Born Addicted: The Number of Opioid-Addicted Babies Is Soaring.” <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/americas-heroin-epidemic/born-addicted-number-opioid-addicted-babies-soaring-n806346>

<sup>108</sup> Jennifer Lind et al. “Infant and Maternal Characteristics in Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome — Selected Hospitals in Florida, 2010–2011,” 213–16.

<sup>109</sup> Bill Frist, “The Newborn Illness That Nobody Is Talking About - And It's Not Zika.” <https://www.forbes.com/sites/billfrist/2016/09/29/the-newborn-illness-that-is-costing-our-health-care-system-billions-and-its-not-zika/#7e74379f3f5f>

by the pilot and the captain due to their (supposedly) greater sea experience. The ill-fated decision was made by the three people-in-charge, bringing the natural evil on all the ship's occupants (the passengers, the prisoners, the soldiers, and the sailors). The prisoners like Paul had much more to lose in a storm than the other passengers (e.g., Luke) since they would have to forfeit their lives in the mere eventuality of a shipwreck as the soldiers were intent on preventing any possible escape. "And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, that none of them should swim away and escape" (Acts 27:42).

Thus, natural evils can happen to us due to other people's poor decisions, actions, or inactions. However, as with moral evils, believers can take comfort in the fact that if they love God, he promises in Romans 8:28 that "all things (including natural evils) work together for good" for his children (e.g., Paul was saved and survived the shipwreck). Therefore, "consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing"<sup>110</sup> for "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

### *7.4.3 Natural "Evils" Coming from God's Hands.*

#### 7.4.3.1 Natural "Evils" for the Edification of Believers.

After the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans<sup>111</sup>, a survey was conducted among 680 randomly selected adult evacuees to Houston shelters by the Washington Post in collaboration with the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University. When asked "How

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<sup>110</sup> James 1:2-4.

<sup>111</sup> A natural evil can be a combination of several factors. For example, Hurricane Katrina can come from God but the subsequent levees' failures are due to human negligence.

important a role has religion played in helping you get through these past two weeks?” 92% said that religion’s role was important, 6% answered that it was not important, and 1% did not know. In answer to the subsequent question, “Has this experience strengthened your religious faith, weakened your faith, or has it made no difference to your religious faith?” 81% claimed that the event had strengthened their religious faith, 4% responded that it had weakened their faith, 14% said that it made no difference, and 2% either did not know or refused to answer. When further asked, “Were any members of your family, neighbors or close friends killed during the storm or flooding, or not?” 14% answered “Yes,” 31% did not know, 54% said “No.”<sup>112</sup> Thus, it appears that natural evil can strengthen people’s religious faith in spite (or because) of the great pains and sufferings.

In 2012, a study was conducted “to explore the role of spirituality in the lives of earthquake survivors in Haiti.” 108 subjects were interviewed, all of whom had “experienced some degree of loss (e.g., loss of family members, health, job, home, school, vocation, etc.).” The researchers concluded that “the findings from this study support previous research that suggests that trauma can be an impetus for spiritual growth and renewal, and that some people perceive and value God's involvement during times of trauma. Study findings also support our hypothesis that individuals who perceived positive involvement and interaction in their relationship with God would experience growth and spiritual transformation despite the nature and severity of their losses.”<sup>113</sup>

In Job 1:19, “a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people (Job’s children) and they died.” How did Job’s faith

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<sup>112</sup> “Survey of Hurricane Katrina Evacuees.”

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/katrina\\_poll091605.pdf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/katrina_poll091605.pdf)

<sup>113</sup> Kari O’Grady et al., “Earthquake in Haiti: Relationship with the Sacred in Times of Trauma,” 289–301.

fare in this (and other natural) “evil”? ““The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.’ Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God” (Job 1:21–22).

After his many trials, Job’s faith and trust in God was strengthened as he learned not to question God’s ways with humans. “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore, I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5–6).

God sustains creation and provides for his creatures. “You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16). “He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). “In Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). In his wisdom, God may occasionally bring natural “evils” in his followers’ lives for the purpose of strengthening their faith and edify them in the ways of God. However, as humans are free creatures, they may choose to grow closer to God or they may decide to become bitter toward him for not keeping his part of the (alleged) “contract” (e.g., health and wealth in exchange for worship and tithing). “The prosperity gospel holds to this illusion of control until the very end. If a believer gets sick and dies, shame compounds the grief. Those who are loved and lost are just that — those who have lost the test of faith. In my work, I have heard countless stories of refusing to acknowledge that the end had finally come. An emaciated man [sic] was pushed about a megachurch in a wheelchair as churchgoers declared that he was already healed. A woman danced around her sister’s deathbed shouting to horrified family members that the body can yet live. There is no graceful death, no *ars moriendi*,<sup>114</sup> in the

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<sup>114</sup> “*Ars moriendi* (“The Art of Dying”) is the name of two related Latin texts dating from about 1415 and 1450 C.E. which offer advice on the protocols and procedures of a good death and on how to “die well,” according to Christian precepts of the late Middle Ages. It was written within the historical context of the effects of the macabre horrors of the Black Death that occurred sixty years earlier and the subsequent social upheavals of the fifteenth century. It was very popular, translated into most West European languages, and was the first in a western literary tradition of guides to death and dying.” [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ars\\_moriendi](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ars_moriendi)



prosperity gospel. There are only jarring disappointments after fevered attempts to deny its inevitability.”<sup>115</sup>

God does not desire people to follow him just for the sake of health, wealth, and material things. “Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (John 6:26–27). God’s intent is for his people to grow in faith and trust in him and that may require a certain amount of natural “evils.”<sup>116</sup> However, all things (including natural “evils”) “work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).<sup>117</sup>

#### 7.4.3.2 Natural “Evils” for the Discipline of Believers.

“Kaldjian et al. (1998) surveyed 90 HIV-positive patients on the HIV/AIDS floor of Yale-New Haven hospital. Of the sample 90% were Christian, and 3% were Muslim; 7% reported no affiliation. Investigators reported that 44% of patients felt guilty about their HIV infection, 32% expressed a fear of death, and 26% felt their disease was a form of punishment (17% said it was a punishment from God).”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Kate Bowler, “Death, the Prosperity Gospel and Me.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/14/opinion/sunday/death-the-prosperity-gospel-and-me.html>

<sup>116</sup> John Hick advocates a similar approach. “Thus the hypothesis of a divine purpose in which finite persons are created at an epistemic distance from God, in order that they may gradually become children of God through their own moral and spiritual choices, requires that their environment, instead of being a pain-free and stress-free paradise, be broadly the kind of world of which we find ourselves to be a part.” John Hick, “Soul-Making Theodicy,” 273.

<sup>117</sup> Of course, no promises of “ultimate good” are given to non-believers. “Sufferer-centered requirements” (as advocated by Marilyn Adams and Eleonore Stump) may not be applicable to all sufferers. Not all are compensated either on earth or in heaven for their sufferings. Believers can also forfeit the promise of “ultimate good” (i.e., all things work together for good) if they decide to persist in their self-chosen path of disobedience against God’s commands and admonitions.

<sup>118</sup> Harold G. Koenig, Michael E. McCullough, and David B. Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 82.

“Believe it or not, in 1992, a whopping 36 percent of Americans believed AIDS might be God’s punishment for immoral sexual behavior . . . In 1987, Reverend Jerry Falwell famously said, ‘God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah primarily because of the sin of homosexuality. Today He is again bringing judgment against this wicked practice through AIDS.’”<sup>119</sup> In Islam, “If the misfortune results from sin, such as sexually-transmitted diseases or illnesses caused by drinking alcohol and taking drugs, and so on, then this is the kind of punishment that comes in this world (as opposed to being deferred until the Hereafter).”<sup>120</sup>

While the concept of diseases (i.e., natural evils) as punishments from God cannot be ascertained scientifically, the belief seems to be deeply entrenched in the human psyche. “The traditional belief among Christians that madness is often a punishment ‘visited by God on the sinner’ . . . predominated in American society during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and remained quite influential thereafter. Insofar as traditional Christianity stresses sin as the cause of insanity, although by no means the only cause, persons with mental illness become stigmatized. Of course, all forms of misfortune, including so-called physical illnesses, were also often considered the wages of sin.”<sup>121</sup>

Following the devastating earthquake and tsunami leading to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant meltdown in 2011, Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara said “that the calamity that hit his country was ‘tenbatsu,’ or divine punishment, for the wickedness of the Japanese people. ‘We need a tsunami to wipe out egoism, which has rusted onto the mentality of Japanese

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<sup>119</sup> Antonia Blumberg. “Fourteen Percent Of Americans Believe AIDS Might Be God’s Punishment: Survey.” [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/28/aids-hiv-gods-punishment\\_n\\_4876381.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/28/aids-hiv-gods-punishment_n_4876381.html)

<sup>120</sup> <https://islamqa.info/en/324>

<sup>121</sup> Norman Dain, “Madness and the Stigma of Sin in American Christianity,” 73.

over a long period of time,' he said. 'I think the disaster is a kind of divine punishment, although I feel sorry for disaster victims.'"<sup>122</sup>

The Bible records many instances of natural evils as God's discipline for believers. For example, King Uzziah was struck by God with leprosy for attempting to usurp the priests' duty of burning incense in the temple (2 Chronicles 26:21). King Jehoshaphat's ships were wrecked before they could go to Tarshish to trade. This was God's punishment for Jehoshaphat's unholy alliance with the wicked King Ahaziah (2 Chronicles 20:36–37). God through the prophet Elijah punished Israel and King Ahab with a drought for worshiping other gods (1 Kings 17:1). God decreed a plague on David's kingdom for ordering a census (2 Samuel 24:13–15).

Did the disciplinary actions accomplish their desired goals of bringing the kings to repentance? "King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 26:21). "According to Scripture, Uzziah's leprosy lasted the rest of his life, which lasted more than a decade beyond this. It isn't clear whether Uzziah repented."<sup>123</sup> King Jehoshaphat did not learn his lesson and subsequently allied himself with the wicked King Jehoram (2 Kings 3:7). King Ahab persisted in his evil ways, causing the death of Naboth to take his vineyard (1 Kings 21). In contrast, King David repented and obtained a reprieve from the Lord who spared Jerusalem and David's house from the plague (1 Chronicles 21).

Natural evils intended as disciplinary actions for believers were given with the goal of bringing them to repentance and a closer relationship with God. However, as believers (like non-

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<sup>122</sup> Devin Dwyer, "Divine Retribution? Japan Quake, Tsunami Resurface God Debate." <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/japan-earthquake-tsunami-divine-retribution-natural-disaster-religious/story?id=13167670>

<sup>123</sup> <http://bible.ucg.org/bible-commentary/2-Chronicles/King-Uzziah-of-Judah-usurps-priestly-duty-and-God-strikes-him-with-leprosy;-King-Menahem-of-Israel-pays-tribute-to-Assyria;-Death-of-Menahem;-Pekahiah-king-of-Israel/>

believers) are free to make their own decisions, they may choose to ignore God’s discipline and stubbornly persist in their chosen paths. For these unwise actions, they only have themselves to blame for the evil consequences!

Nevertheless, since God is gracious and merciful, a belated repentance may yet bring a measure of respite from evil. For example, the Prodigal Son had a late change of heart. As a result of his repentance, he was saved from starvation and destitution. “Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate” (Luke 15:22–23). Believers would do well to respond quickly to God’s discipline. “Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you” (Psalm 32:9).

#### 7.4.3.3 Natural “Evils” for the Deterrence of Believers.

“Deterrence remains the cornerstone of our penal system although its efficacy has not been scientifically proven . . . There seems to be no doubt that *deterrence has its limits*. It cannot be very effective in certain situations, with regard to certain types of offenses and certain types of actual and potential offenders (emphases in original).”<sup>124</sup> According to the National Institute of Justice, an agency of the US Department of Justice, “the *certainty* of being caught is a vastly more powerful deterrent than the punishment.”<sup>125</sup> If that is correct, God’s omniscience and omnipotence (guaranteeing the apprehension of wrongdoers either in this world or the one to come) should serve as a significant deterrence of evils in this world among believers. Of course,

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<sup>124</sup> Department of Justice Canada. “Fear of Punishment: Deterrence.” <http://www.lareau-law.ca/Fear.pdf>

<sup>125</sup> National Institute of Justice. “Five Things about Deterrence.” <https://nij.gov/five-things/pages/deterrence.aspx>

non-theists who do not believe in the existence of God can hardly be deterred from committing evils by such a notion.

God used “fire and brimstone” (e.g., debris from a comet<sup>126</sup> or an asteroid<sup>127</sup>) to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah on account of their wickedness (Genesis 19). “He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter” (2 Peter 2:6). The lesson of the destroyed cities was also used by Jesus to deter other towns from the folly of following in their footsteps.

“Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city” (Matthew 10:14–15).

God also used a “thorn in the flesh”<sup>128</sup> (e.g., a physical malady) in Paul’s life, “a messenger of Satan to torment me-- to keep me from exalting myself!” (2 Corinthians 12:7). “Even the holiest Christians, after their most heavenly acquaintance, [their most intimate communion with God, and largest communications of light and grace from him], are not out of danger of pride, or of being too much exalted. 2d, this spiritual pride is so dangerous a sin, that it is a mercy to be saved from it, even by bodily pain. 3d, God will hurt the bodies to save the souls, even of his dearest children. 4th, Satan, that intendeth hurt, is oft God’s instrument to do us good. 5th, bodily pains are oft the messengers of Satan, and yet of God.”<sup>129</sup> “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”<sup>130</sup> God, in his wisdom, gave Paul a special deterrence to

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<sup>126</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/sodom-and-gomorrah-destroyed-by-a-comet-say-astronomers-1275763.html>

<sup>127</sup> [https://www.theregister.co.uk/2008/03/31/kofels\\_asteroid/](https://www.theregister.co.uk/2008/03/31/kofels_asteroid/)

<sup>128</sup> Paul’s thorn in the flesh has been variously interpreted as a physical malady (e.g., poor eyesight, a rejection of his ministry or a harassment by a literal demon. See David Abernathy, “Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh: A Messenger of Satan?” 69–79.

<sup>129</sup> *Benson Commentary*, [http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2\\_corinthians/12-7.htm](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/12-7.htm)

<sup>130</sup> Benjamin Franklin. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/247269-an-ounce-of-prevention-is-worth-a-pound-of-cure>

keep him from the destructive sin of spiritual pride as he had been given “surpassingly great revelations” from God (Paul “was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak,” 2 Corinthians 12:4).

Thus, natural evils can be used by God to deter believers from committing evil. Furthermore, the discipline of some can serve as a deterrent for others. Of course, it is a lot cheaper (and a lot less painful) to learn from someone else’s trials and tribulations!

#### 7.4.3.4 Natural “Evils” for the Rehabilitation of Believers.

Dr. Erwin Lutzer said: “Natural disasters are a megaphone from God, and they teach us various lessons. First of all, natural disasters show us the uncertainty of life. Thousands of people wake up in the morning not knowing what is going to happen that day, such as the terrible devastation in Haiti and elsewhere . . . We can’t get away from the reality that life is very, very short and it’s possible for us to delude ourselves. When we look at the news and see these disasters, it’s like a preview of the natural disasters that will someday come upon the earth. When you look at the second coming of Christ, you find many different natural disasters connected with it.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, natural disasters can serve as a wake-up call for Christians, reminding them of the necessity to prepare for the next life in the kingdom of God. Believers who are caught in the pursuit of the four P (power, prestige, pleasure, and possession) may come to their senses and return to the single quest of the great and foremost commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

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<sup>131</sup> <https://billygraham.org/story/where-is-god-in-natural-disasters-2/>

Unloving Jonah refused to obey God's call to go and warn Nineveh of its upcoming disaster. Instead, he fled from the Lord on a ship to Tarshish. In response, God brought natural evils against Jonah in the form of a "great storm" and a "great fish." Following these painful experiences, Jonah finally came to his senses and repented. "Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish . . . Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land" (Jonah 2:1,10). Jonah was rehabilitated and went on to proclaim the Lord's message in Nineveh.

Michael was born in New York city, the son of a Greek father and a Puerto Rican mother. He was raised a Catholic and attended a parochial grammar school. "I give thanks to the Catholic training because of course, they brought me to the heart of Jesus."<sup>132</sup> He started a musical career at the age of 15 with the Five Gents (Doo Wop rhythm and blues). His first successes came at the age of 16 with the hit songs, "Bless You" and "Hallway to Paradise." He recorded more albums and worked his way up to become a vice president of CBS music. However, his personal life fell apart. "I wanted to be that tough, bad boy, at least for just a little period of time. And the bad boy point of view got me into trouble, and I began to self-destruct like probably half the performers of the 70s, if not more."<sup>133</sup>

In 1977, his close friend Freddie Prinze, star of the show *Chico and the Man*, depressed and despondent after a divorce, died of a gunshot wound to the head at the age of 22.<sup>134</sup> Michael wistfully reminisced: "When Freddie Prinze passed that had an impact on me, because I loved him. I still love him, to this day. And it was a great loss to all of us who knew Freddie."<sup>135</sup> Soon after, the evil tide struck again. "Then, I lost my sister that same year, same period of time. My

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<sup>132</sup> <http://www1.cbn.com/music/tony-orlando%27s-brush-with-death>

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/archives/la-me-freddie-prinz-19770130-story.html>

<sup>135</sup> <http://www1.cbn.com/music/tony-orlando%27s-brush-with-death>

sister, Rhonda was 20 years old. She had cerebral palsy . . . There was all this passing away going on, and I was 32 then, hitting this stride in my career. I had this national television show. I had the hits. I had everything going, and it just seemed like everything was coming apart.”<sup>136</sup>

Michael Anthony Orlando (of the *Tony Orlando and Dawn* music group) had a breakdown and retired from singing. However, God did not abandon him. “Fortunately, I was brought up with the Lord as my Savior . . . I began to pay attention to Scripture and meet people who walked the walk, and little by little, I guess you could call me a born-again Christian. 1978 is when I found my walk with the Lord. I hopefully do the best I can, in walking that walk, and maybe have inspired others to follow in it, and am very proud of my Christian faith.”<sup>137</sup> He was rehabilitated, returned to television, and continued his musical career.

Natural evils (e.g., deaths of loved ones) can happen in believers’ lives and may serve as a tool to rehabilitate them to a closer relationship with him. We are often not aware of our problems, blithely living with unacknowledged issues in our lives. In his wisdom, God may bring natural evils (e.g., diseases, natural disasters, accidental house fires . . .) to wake us up to our sinful condition and rehabilitate us to the ministry he has called us to do.

In summary, natural evils can come into believers’ lives from their own actions, from other people’s actions, from God for the purpose of edification, discipline, deterrence, or rehabilitation or from a combination of these reasons. Natural evils can also be “attached” or “unattached” to moral evils (e.g., forest fires caused by human carelessness versus lightning-caused forest fires).

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.



The sources (and reasons) of moral or natural evils in this world may be difficult to determine with any certainty.<sup>138</sup> However, believers may take comfort in God's promise that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). Thus, will our pains and sufferings be redeemed by the good we experience in the afterlife? What do the Scriptures teach about heaven and hell?

## 7.5 Heaven and Hell.

### 7.5.1 Hell.

Since God does not coerce anyone to believe in him, hell<sup>139</sup> for non-believers may be the natural outcome of humans' free will decision to acknowledge or not acknowledge their creator, Kvanvig's "Choice Model" of hell.<sup>140</sup> This is in contrast with the views of various scholars (e.g., Marilyn Adams,<sup>141</sup> John Hick,<sup>142</sup> and John Bishop)<sup>143</sup> who advocated "universal salvation," a

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<sup>138</sup> We may not be able to determine *why* (or from where) some evils come into our lives. Concerning the accidental death of his son Eric, Dr. Wolterstorff wrote: "I do not know why God did not prevent Eric's death . . . I am at a loss." Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 67.

<sup>139</sup> Hell can be understood as an "eternal separation from God." Dr. Ragland wrote: "As a state of eternal separation from God, hell would frustrate this central human desire (union with God)." C. P. Ragland, "Hell" *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://www.iep.utm.edu/hell/> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* stated: "Hell's principal punishment consists of eternal separation from God."

[https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p123a12.htm](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a12.htm). The *Lausanne Covenant* adopted by evangelicals in 1974 affirmed: "Those who reject Christ repudiate the joy of salvation and condemn themselves to eternal separation from God." <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov>

<sup>140</sup> Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*. Also see Jerry Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*.

<sup>141</sup> Dr. Marilyn McCord Adams opined: "It follows that such a doctrine of hell is incompatible with God's perfect justice. For if God is perfectly just in the sense that his actions perfectly measure up to our ordinary moral standards about what people deserve, and by those principles no man can deserve eternal damnation, then God will not condemn any man to hell on the day of judgment." Marilyn McCord Adams, "Hell and the God of Justice," 447. Adams advocated: "My brand of universalism offers all the advantages of Augustine's and Calvin's *sola gratia* approaches." Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," 325.

<sup>142</sup> Dr. John Hick wrote: "'God will eventually succeed in His purpose of winning all men to Himself.'" John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 342.

<sup>143</sup> Dr. John Bishop said: "If God is a supreme personal agent, there would be a defect in either his power or goodness if he could not provide for universal salvation (emphasis in original)." John Bishop, "On Identifying the Problem of Evil and the Possibility of Its Theist Solution," 51.

non-orthodox view of the doctrine. Dr. Bauckham observed: “The history of the doctrine of universal salvation (or *apokastastasis*) is a remarkable one. Until the nineteenth century almost all Christian theologians taught the reality of eternal torment in hell.”<sup>144</sup>

C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Great Divorce*: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done. All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice, there could be no Hell.”<sup>145</sup> After a lifetime of denying God’s existence and refusing God’s gift of eternal life from the Savior Jesus Christ, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), non-believers may continue to do so in the afterlife,<sup>146</sup> away from God’s presence.<sup>147</sup>

Non-theists thus live far away from God, in the company of kindred souls (e.g., Hugh Hefner, Stalin), and must shoulder the responsibilities for their actions, whether good or bad.<sup>148</sup> God cannot be blamed for the outcome as he has ceaselessly endeavored to bring them back to himself through the tireless work of the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Parachurch organizations in disseminating the Gospel message with Bible giveaways, TV and radio broadcasts, evangelistic rallies . . . The last-ditch effort of “tough-love” (in combination with God’s other approaches) may not be enough to overcome humans’ stubbornness and desire to control their own lives. And for that, sadly, they have no one to blame but themselves!<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Richard Bauckham, “Universalism, a Historical Survey,” 47.

<sup>145</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 72.

<sup>146</sup> This assumes that there is an afterlife, a proposal that may not be accepted by non-theists.

<sup>147</sup> This assumes that God exists, a proposal that may not be accepted by non-theists.

<sup>148</sup> The pains, sufferings, and evils encountered by non-theists may well be “gratuitous,” a product of “random chance” in this world of selfish people and fickle environments.

<sup>149</sup> For a more complete discussion of hell and evil, see Buckareff and Plug, “Hell and the Problem of Evil,” 128–43. The problem of “vagueness” (i.e., “arbitrary cutoffs between the saved and the unsaved”) is addressed in 2 Timothy 2:19. “The Lord knows those who are his.” Since God is omniscient, he knows who is saved and who is lost. As such, there is no *arbitrary* cutoffs for God since he perceives “the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5). The problem of “diminished capacities” (i.e., “agents do not have it in their power to fully appreciate the gravity of their circumstances”) is answered in Romans 1:20. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His

Questions have been raised whether it is fair or just for God to condemn some people to hell for eternity as the consequence of some finite sins on earth.<sup>150</sup> Dr. Stephen Kershner wrote: “I specifically argue that human beings do not deserve hell because they either cannot cause an infinite amount of harm or are not responsible for doing so. Also, since humans don't have infinitely bad characters, hell can't be deserved on the basis of character. Since humans don't deserve hell, God may not (or perhaps cannot) impose unjust punishments and hence may not (or cannot) send or allow persons to go to hell.”<sup>151</sup> However, it appears that rejection and denial of an *infinite* being's existence calls for an *infinite* punishment. Thomas Aquinas said: “The magnitude of the punishment matches the magnitude of the sin; according to the measure of the sin, shall the measure of the stripes also be. Now a sin that is against God is infinite; the higher the person against whom it is committed, the graver the sin – it is more criminal to strike a head of state than a private citizen – and God is of infinite greatness. Therefore an infinite punishment is deserved for a sin committed against him.”<sup>152</sup> Anselm explained in his work *Cur Deus Homo*: “Sin is nothing else than not to render to God his due . . . everyone who sins ought to pay back the honor of which he has robbed God,”<sup>153</sup> and “satisfaction should be proportionate to guilt.”<sup>154</sup> Dr. R. C. Sproul Jr. averred: “Sin, the church has argued, must be punished infinitely because we

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eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” Despite their “diminished capacities,” humans can *clearly* see God's creation and are therefore held responsible for rejecting God. The “problem of morally culpable procreation” (i.e., parents are morally culpable for bringing children who “may wind up in hell”) is resolved by Ezekiel 18:20. “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity.” The problem of “religious practice” (i.e., God may be cruel or indifferent) and the problem of “proportionality” (i.e., infinite, eternal punishment for finite sins) are discussed in the text.

<sup>150</sup> Dr. White wrote: “Hell is both the creature's choice and divine punishment.” Heath White, *Fate and Free Will*, 319.

<sup>151</sup> Stephen Kershner, “The Injustice of Hell,” 103.

<sup>152</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.2.87

<sup>153</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, Chapter XI.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter XX.

sin against an infinitely holy God.”<sup>155</sup> Dr. Rosscup opined: “As Jesus did, Paul forecast a ‘day of wrath’ when God will reckon ultimately with those who have rejected Him . . . Of course, Paul sees retribution as ‘eternal’ in 2 Thess 1:8–9.”<sup>156</sup>

In “tough love” and long-suffering, God has been patient with people who persistently deny his existence. Nevertheless, “just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27 NIV), we will eventually have to meet our maker and “give an account of ourselves to God” (Romans 14:12 NIV). God is neither cruel nor indifferent to our sins. He is a God of justice and “will repay each person according to what they have done” (Romans 2:6), whether good or evil.

#### 7.5.2 Heaven.

In the “Quantum Proposal”<sup>157</sup> and the “Tough-love Proposal,” God gave Adam two choices/paths. Against God’s command, Adam chose path two (disobedience and death), this world with its many evils. The Fall and evil in the world are therefore Adam’s responsibilities.

However, in his grace and mercy, God provided a substitute/savior for humans in this non-recommended path. “When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4–5). Nevertheless, God’s plan of salvation/rescue is not forced on anyone. People are free to accept or reject the Savior’s offer.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> R. C. Sproul Jr., “How Can an Infinite Hell Be Just When Our Sins Are Finite?” <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/how-can-infinite-hell-be-just-when-our-sins-are-finite/>

<sup>156</sup> James Rosscup, “Paul’s Concept of Eternal Punishment,” 175.

<sup>157</sup> See Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*.

<sup>158</sup> Some possible exceptions may be John the Baptist (Luke 1:15–17) and Paul the Apostle (Galatians 1:15).

“But as many as received Him (Jesus Christ the Savior), to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of men, but of God” (John 1:12-13). After his death (as a substitute for humans), resurrection, and ascension, Christ is preparing a place for believers/children of God in heaven. Dr. Charles Hodge wrote: “The place of the final abode of the righteous is sometimes called a house as when the Saviour said,”<sup>159</sup> “In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2–3).

At the right time (only known by God the Father, Mark 13:32 and Matthew 24:36), “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). “For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24). Christ “is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him” (1 Peter 3:22). Thus, believers will always be in heaven with Christ and God. Dr. Grudem proclaimed: “Then with joy, our hearts and voices will join with the redeemed from all ages and with the mighty armies of heaven singing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty, who was and is and is to come!’ (Revelation 4:8).”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology Vol.3*, 744.

<sup>160</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1164.

In the Final State (i.e. The New Heaven and the New Earth, Revelation 21:1), Satan will be banished forever from the presence of the Lord. “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). There will be no sin or evil before the Holy God and the spotless Lamb in heaven. “Nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Revelation 21:27).

In heaven, believers will have a glorified body for the Lord “will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:21). This glorified body will not grow old, weak, sick, or die. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). Since there is no death in heaven, there is no need for procreation (Matthew 22:30). Also, “there will be no night there”<sup>161</sup> (Revelation 21:25) and “there is no longer any sea” (Revelation 21:1). Our new minds will be able to understand things fully. “For now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2). We will partake of the “marriage supper of the lamb” (Revelation 19:9). We will receive a reward<sup>162</sup> for our work on earth (1 Corinthians 3:13–14). We will enjoy “a sabbath rest” (Hebrews 4:9),

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<sup>161</sup> One can wonder whether the glorified human body needs to sleep since there is no night in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

<sup>162</sup> While it is true that believers will receive rewards for what they have done on earth, their motivation should be serving the Lord for the sake of love rather than with the expectation of rewards. “So, you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done'" (Luke 17:10).

worship God face to face (Revelation 22:3–4), and “reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5).

Dr. Erickson said: “The nature of the future states is far more intense than anything known in this life. The images used to depict them are quite inadequate to fully convey what lies ahead.”<sup>163</sup>

### 7.5.3 Some Questions and Speculations.

#### 7.5.3.1 What Would Have Happened Had Adam Chosen the Path of Obedience?

The Scriptures did not address the issue, except to say that Adam would have lived (rather than die, become mortal, Genesis 2:17). One can *speculate* that, after a certain time of continued love and obedience, Adam, Eve (and their progeny) will be granted permanent righteousness and everlasting life.<sup>164</sup>

#### 7.5.3.2. How Can Peccable (i.e., Potentially Sinful) Believers Attain “Union with God” and Impeccability?

At this time in the present world, according to the apostle Paul, believers are betrothed (i.e., engaged for a future marriage)<sup>165</sup> to Christ. “I (the apostle Paul) betrothed<sup>166</sup> you to one

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<sup>163</sup> Millard Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 479.

<sup>164</sup> Dr. Michael Horton opined: “Had Adam fulfilled the probation in the garden, God would have confirmed him and his descendants in righteousness and everlasting life forever.” Michael Horton, “A Classical Calvinist View,” 32. Dr. Stephen Ashby disagreed: “My response is that this must be read into the text; it certainly is not something that a reader naturally gets from the text by normal exegetical methodology.” Stephen Ashby, “A Reformed Arminian Response to Michael S. Horton,” 51. Following the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics, we agree with Dr. Ashby and therefore call Adam’s “probation period” a speculation.

<sup>165</sup> The Greek “Harmozo” means “to betroth, to give one in marriage to anyone.” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*. <https://biblehub.com/greek/718.htm>. Paul will “present you (the Corinthian church) as a chaste virgin to Christ—at His coming, when the heavenly marriage shall take place (Mt 25:6).” *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary*. [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2\\_corinthians/11-2.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/11-2.htm)

<sup>166</sup> Paul acts as “the marriage-friend of the Jews . . . who not only wooed the bride for the bridegroom, but who was the constant medium between the two, and at the wedding itself was regulator of the feast.” *Meyer’s NT Commentary*. [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2\\_corinthians/11-2.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/11-2.htm)

husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin” (2 Corinthians 11:2). “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God” (Romans 7:4). The Church is now Christ’s future bride. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church . . . that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory” (Ephesians 5:25, 27). Believers in heaven will be able to attend the marriage feast as the bride. “‘Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.’ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (Revelation 19:7–8).

Dr. Herman Bavinck wrote concerning God’s intended goal of having his “fully finished image” expressed in a union with “humanity in its entirety—as one complete organism, summed up under a single head . . . the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God. Scriptures clearly teaches all this when it says that the church is the bride of Christ.”<sup>167</sup> Humans will attain impeccability<sup>168</sup> and union with Christ<sup>169</sup> through marriage for “the two shall become

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<sup>167</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, 577.

<sup>168</sup> Dr. Henderson averred: “The redeemed in heaven will be impeccable forever.” Luke Henderson, “Heaven,” 179.

<sup>169</sup> Concerning the “union with Christ,” Clement of Alexandria said: “Knowing God, he will be made like God . . . man becomes God, since so God wills.” Clement of Alexandria, *The Sacred Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, 167. Athanasius wrote: “For he (Christ) was made man that we might be made God.” Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 93. Aquinas added: “With regard to the full participation of the Divinity, which is the true bliss of man and end of human life; and this is bestowed upon us by Christ’s humanity; for Augustine says in a sermon (xiii, de Temp.): *God was made man, that man might be made God.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 3.1.2. Whatever “union with Christ” might mean, we are not claiming that humans can become gods, since God cannot be created. However, we can be “partakers of the divine nature.” “For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Peter 1:4). . “We are said to be partakers of the Divine nature, not by any communication of the Divine essence to us, but by God’s impressing upon us, and infusing into us, those divine qualities and dispositions (knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness) which do express and resemble the perfections of God, and are called his image.” *Matthew Poole’s Commentary*, [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2\\_peter/1-4.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_peter/1-4.htm). Dr. Fairbairn wrote: “Like Athanasius, but with much more precision, Cyril distinguishes two kinds of unity between the Father and the Son. The first is a unity of substance, and the Father and the Son do not share this kind of unity with us in any way whatsoever. The second, though, is a unity of love or fellowship that the father and the Son have enjoyed from all eternity precisely because of their unity of substance. Cyril argues that God does share this kind of unity with us.” Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 35–36.



one flesh. This mystery is great; but I (Paul) am speaking with reference to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5: 31–32). They will become *one* with him (“The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him” 1 Corinthians 6:17). and will no longer be able to sin (i.e., free will and no sin).<sup>170</sup> “In the fulfillment of grace, man [sic] will have the posse peccare (ability to sin) taken away and receive the highest of all, the power not to be able to sin, non-posse peccare.”<sup>171</sup> Irenaeus affirmed: “For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality unless we have been united to incorruptibility and immortality.”<sup>172</sup>

Professor Murray stated that “union with Christ is the *central truth* of the whole doctrine of salvation (emphasis mine)”<sup>173</sup> Following their permanent and unbreakable union with Christ,<sup>174</sup> humans will be ushered into the eternal state. Thus, “we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17), in an eternal love relationship with him (Romans 8:37–39).

If that is correct, the non-recommended path (our actual world) will eventually lead to the same eternal state (e.g., impeccability in a marriage union with Christ, Ephesians 5:31–32), albeit

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<sup>170</sup> “The traditional view of heaven holds that the redeemed in heaven both have free will and are no longer capable of sinning. A number of philosophers have argued that the traditional view is problematic. How can someone be free and yet incapable of sinning? If the redeemed are kept from sinning, their wills must be reined in. And if their wills are reined in, it doesn’t seem right to say that they are free. Following James Sennett, we call this objection to the traditional view of heaven ‘the Problem of Heavenly Freedom . . . On our view, while an agent must have alternative possibilities open to her at some time in order to be free, the agent need not always have alternative possibilities open to her. She may freely form her character such that she can’t choose not to perform some particular action at a later time, and nevertheless do the latter action freely.” Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” 398–400. The “Tough-love Proposal” suggests the solution that humans will acquire *impeccability* by becoming *united with Christ through marriage*. “We are members of His body. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:30–32). “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride (the Church) has made herself ready.” Revelation 19:7. Christ being fully God and fully Man can take a bride in marriage. This solution also resolves the problem raised by Dr. Schellenberg that God could (and should) give finite beings “good-without-evil.” “God’s motive in creating the world is the motive to share with finite beings good-without-evil.” J. L. Schellenberg, “A New Logical Problem of Evil,” 44. “Good-without-evil” (i.e., impeccability, “free will and no sin” just like Christ) can only be given to creatures in an “union with God.”

<sup>171</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, note 229, 105.

<sup>172</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 202.

<sup>173</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 170.

<sup>174</sup> “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5.

after a long and horribly painful detour (e.g., the Holocaust), the loss of billions of souls to evil (Satan), and the required atoning death of Christ for humanity's sins. Thus, God's recommended option (e.g., the life path of obedience) is *always* the better alternative.

### 7.5.3.3 Why Did God Not Immediately Create Impeccable Creatures Through Marriage?

God's reasons are not explained in the Scriptures.<sup>175</sup> However, it stands to reason that, for a successful marriage, God wants Adam and Eve to love him freely, willingly, and without any coercion, as a coerced love,<sup>176</sup> no-choice love,<sup>177</sup> or robotic love is no love at all! The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre observed: "The man who wants to be loved does not desire the enslavement of the beloved. He is not bent on becoming the object of passion which flows forth mechanically. He does not want to possess an automaton . . . The total enslavement of the beloved kills the love of the lover . . . the lover does not desire to possess the beloved as one possesses a thing; he demands a special type of appropriation. He wants to possess a freedom as freedom."<sup>178</sup> Thus, a "testing ground" of true love and obedience appears to be necessary prior to the ushering of a blessed eternal state. Adam's descendants who choose to love God in this fallen world will be ushered into heaven and will be able to love the Lord for ever and ever. The

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<sup>175</sup> Nevertheless, humans as creatures have no cause to complain. Irenaeus observed: "For we cast blame upon Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods." Irenaeus, *Ibid.*, 305. Dr. Goetz suggests: "It is because of the existence of the intrinsic good of justice that God does not create everyone in heaven. He cannot create everyone in heaven without acting unjustly." Stewart Goetz, "The Argument from Evil," footnote 22, 482.

<sup>176</sup> Dr. Hick said: "Is it logically possible for God so to make men [sic] that they will freely respond to Himself in love and trust and faith? I believe that the answer is no." John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 272. God cannot logically *make* humans love him *freely*.

<sup>177</sup> Dr. Schellenberg argued that "an evil-permitting free will apparently cannot be part of any good that God is motivated to share with finite persons in creation. . . there is clearly no room to say that the love God would be motivated to facilitate among creatures could come with the possibility of rejection." J. L. Schellenberg, "A New Logical Problem of Evil," 44. In the "Tough-love Proposal," God's perfect love, as one of his attributes, cannot be given to creatures. Thus creaturely "love," being imperfect, may come with the possibility of rejection.

<sup>178</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *Basic Writings*, 230.

children of Adam who choose otherwise in this sinful realm will be ushered into an eternal state away from God's presence, fulfilling their cherished desire to assert their independence from their creator!

#### 7.5.3.4 What Happened to Adam and Eve When They Disobeyed God?

Adam and Eve were created peccable, in Thomas Aquinas' "state of innocence"<sup>179</sup> (i.e., without any actual sin). They had the free will to obey (i.e., good) or disobey God (i.e., evil). After the serpent's temptation, they fell (i.e., sinned) and became slaves to sin (i.e., no longer free not to sin).<sup>180</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). They were "held captive by him (the devil) to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26) and became "by nature children of wrath, even as the rest" (Ephesians 2:3).

However, God, in his great mercy, provided Adam, Eve and their descendants with a Savior (Eve's seed) who will "bruise you (the serpent) on the head" (Genesis 1:15). Humans can be set free from their slavery to sin and Satan by Jesus the Messiah. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). "Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil" (1 Peter

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<sup>179</sup> "Many authorities of the Saints declare that man [sic] possessed grace in the state of innocence." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. 1.95.1.

<sup>180</sup> "Man's original capacities included both the power not to sin and the power to sin (posse non peccare et posse peccare). In Adam's original sin, man lost the posse non peccare (the power not to sin) and retained the posse peccare (the power to sin)—which he continues to exercise." Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, note 229, 105.

2:16, NIV). With the help of the Holy Spirit, children of God are now free to do good (i.e., not to sin) or to do evil.<sup>181</sup> The choices and consequences of their actions are theirs and theirs alone!

#### 7.5.3.5 Assuming that Evolution Is Correct, Why Did God Create Natural Evils (e.g., Animals' Pains, Sufferings, and Deaths) Long Before Humans' Fall?<sup>182</sup>

Several solutions have been proposed (some with and some without the theory of evolution). For example, natural evils are due to the work of Satan and demons (according to Drs. Boyd and Plantinga).<sup>183</sup> Animals are not (fully) conscious of their pains<sup>184</sup> (thus negating the claim of natural evils?). "God loves (has charity) for animal species or the genus as a whole, not the individuals."<sup>185</sup> "God is not an animal as men are, and if he does not change his designs to avoid pain and suffering in animals, he is not violating any natural sympathies."<sup>186</sup> Natural evils are "the price of admission for the existence"<sup>187</sup> of our good world. "We should understand the corrupting effects of the Fall also *retroactively* (in other words, the consequences of the Fall can also act backward into the past)."<sup>188</sup> Natural evil is the result of the Fall of humans.<sup>189</sup>

In the beginning, Adam and Eve were created innocent in the Garden of Eden and enjoyed the benefit of living forever by eating from the tree of life (Genesis 3:22). One can

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<sup>181</sup> "Libertas fidelium - (freedom of the faithful); 'a freedom of those regenerated by the Holy Spirit that is proper to the regenerate nature and is characterized by the ability to sin and to do good.'" [http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/05/the\\_four\\_states\\_of\\_libertas\\_na\\_1.php](http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/05/the_four_states_of_libertas_na_1.php).

<sup>182</sup> Dr. Francescotti wondered: "Why did there have to be so much animal suffering *before humans appeared on the scene?* (emphases in original)" Robert Francescotti, "The Problem of Animal Pain and Suffering," 122.

<sup>183</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 58–59.

<sup>184</sup> Peter Harrison, "Theodicy and Animal Pain," 79–92. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 313.

<sup>185</sup> Mark Maller, "Animals and the Problem of Evil in Recent Theodicies," 28.

<sup>186</sup> Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil*, 80.

<sup>187</sup> William Hasker, "An Open Theist View," 63.

<sup>188</sup> William Dembski, *The End of Christianity*, 50.

<sup>189</sup> Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil," 398.

speculate that there are no deaths of animals since creation was declared to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31). The idyllic path of life was enjoyed by Adam and Eve for a time until the appearance of the serpent-tempter (Genesis 3:1).

In the “Quantum Proposal”<sup>190</sup> and the “Tough-love Proposal,” God gave Adam free will to choose between two options: remain in the path of life or depart to the path of death (Genesis 2). The path/world of death was created by God as well as the world/path of life. In love and fairness, God solemnly commanded Adam to choose the path of life/obedience. However, Adam was free to make up his mind, without God’s presence and interference. Dr. Crenshaw observed: “The very concept of Torah, pervasive in the Bible, implies the freedom to obey or not to obey, unconstrained by divine intervention.”<sup>191</sup> In rebellion, Adam willfully made his ill-fated choice, was driven out of the world/path of life and condemned to live in the path/world of death (i.e., to die).<sup>192</sup>

Assuming that evolution is correct, one can speculate that the path of death involved the deaths of plants (e.g., plant fossils), the pains<sup>193</sup> and deaths of animals (e.g., dinosaur fossils), and the sufferings and deaths of the unfit<sup>194</sup> (e.g., extinct species’ fossils) before Adam’s fall.

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<sup>190</sup> Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*.

<sup>191</sup> James Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil*, 76.

<sup>192</sup> Richard Dawkins said: “Natural selection is out there, and it is a very unpleasant process. Nature is red in tooth and claw. But I don’t want to live in that kind of a world. I want to change the world in which I live in such a way that natural selection no longer applies.” Frank Miele, “Darwin’s Dangerous Disciple: An Interview with Richard Dawkins,” 84.

<sup>193</sup> The “Tough-love Proposal” can accommodate the theory of animal pain and suffering as well as the Neo-Cartesian defenses that deny animal suffering. See Robert Francescotti, “The Problem of Animal Pain and Suffering,” 113–27. Animal pain and suffering is to be expected in a world of death and thus is *not* evidence against the existence of an omnibenevolent God.

<sup>194</sup> Dr. Yujin Nagasawa said: “The entire biological system on which nature is based is fundamentally evil. Hence, I call it the ‘problem of systemic evil.’ . . . Even if theodicies successfully undermine the standard problem of evil by explaining away the evil of specific events or specific types of events, the underlying systemic evil remains.” Yujin Nagasawa, “The Problem of Evil for Atheists,” 154. The “problem of systemic evil” can be explained as a result of human libertarian free will with the *logical necessity* of having the options of obedience (the path of eternal life) and non-obedience/disobedience (the path of universal death/systemic evil).

When Adam chose to disobey, he was sent to the already existing world of death,<sup>195</sup> away from the Lord's presence. One can speculate that God's curse on the ground (Genesis 3:17, Romans 8:20–22) caused some changes in Adam (as Adam was made from the dust of the ground, Genesis 2:7), thus making Adam mortal (the universal principle of death in the path/world of death).<sup>196</sup> God's decree to increase Eve's childbirth pain (Genesis 3:16) can also be understood as causing some changes in Eve (the universal principle of pain, suffering, and death in this world). God's curse on the serpent (Genesis 3:14-15) also caused some changes as he is forever condemned to crawl on his belly. Obviously, the path of death is neither the ideal world nor God's recommended option.<sup>197</sup> In the "Quantum Proposal"<sup>198</sup> and the "Tough-love Proposal," the horrendous pains, "gratuitous" sufferings, and "wasteful" deaths of this fallen realm are not part of God's best plan/path for humans.<sup>199</sup> They made their unwise choice against God's command and had to live with the dire consequences!

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<sup>195</sup> One can speculate that the world/path of (universal) death as well as the world/path of life have been created by God long before the appearance of humans.

<sup>196</sup> One can speculate that God's declaration also changes Adam's body, allowing him to survive in a new and hostile world replete with bacteria, viruses, competing species, predators . . . For example, Adam does not need an immune system in the path of life as there are no deadly pathogens there. However, in the path of death, Adam definitely requires some new ways to cope with his deleterious environment. God designs "a pain system that, even in the midst of a fallen world, still bears the stamp of his genius and equips us for life on this planet." Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* 278.

<sup>197</sup> This approach would answer the question: "Why couldn't God have created a natural order that lacked the capacity to inflict such significant harm on human beings?" Stewart et al., *Fundamentals of Philosophy*, 363. God did create the path/world of life where Adam and Eve would never suffer harm or die.

<sup>198</sup> Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*.

<sup>199</sup> Dr. Griffin wondered: "We can ask why this natural environment had to be created through a long, slow, pain-filled evolutionary process. Hick's God, being essentially omnipotent, could have created the needed environment in the 'twinkling of an eye.'" David Griffin, "Critique of John Hick," 53. Survival in a world of brutal competition and merciless killing may require a long process of evolution, painful adaptation, and relentless natural selection ("natural" survival of the fittest). God's miraculous intervention (e.g., in the "twinkling of an eye") in this non-recommended/forbidden path cannot be expected or demanded. Furthermore, God's continuous interference might be too obvious and would cause undue pressure on people to acknowledge his existence (see Hick's "epistemic distance" where "God is not overwhelmingly evident"). John Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 43. Thus, in our world of death, the evidence is not overwhelmingly for or against God's existence. People of good will may freely (and rationally) choose to acknowledge God or not without any undue coercion on his part.

One can speculate that the world of life may be created by God through creationism (Genesis 1) as there would be no deaths in this path and therefore no biological impetus for evolution,<sup>200</sup> natural selection,<sup>201</sup> and survival of the fittest.<sup>202</sup> In the world of life, one would not expect to find any fossil (plant or animal) since death is non-existent. Natural evils (e.g., earthquakes causing deaths of animals and humans) should not exist in this paradise world.<sup>203</sup> Likewise, moral evils cannot be found in the presence of the Holy God.

On the contrary, the world of death, created by God to give people a genuine free will choice between options, carries the universal principle of death,<sup>204</sup> pain, and suffering.<sup>205</sup> Sadly, the world of death has to undergo the long and painful process of evolution (e.g., pain, suffering, and extinction of the unfit), aptly called “Nature, red in tooth and claw.”<sup>206</sup> Evidence of deaths (e.g., plant and animal fossils) should be abundant. Natural evils (e.g., hurricanes, earthquakes, diseases) should be common fare.<sup>207</sup> Moral evils (in humans’ presence) should be expected.

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<sup>200</sup> “Over time, the population will gradually become more and more suited to its environment as helpful mutations arise and spread through the population, while deleterious ones are weeded out.” Jerry Coyne, *Why Evolution Is True*, 11.

<sup>201</sup> “Programmed deaths instead robustly result in long-term benefit to a lineage, by reducing local environmental resource depletion via spatiotemporal patterns causing feedback over many generations.” Werfel et al., “Programmed Death is Favored by Natural Selection in Spatial Systems.” *Physical Review Letters* (2015), 14(23): 238103.

<sup>202</sup> Alexander Pyron, “We Don’t Need to Save Endangered Species. Extinction is Part of Evolution.” [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/we-dont-need-to-save-endangered-species-extinction-is-part-of-evolution/2017/11/21/57fc5658-cdb4-11e7-a1a3-0d1e45a6de3d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.866655c57ee6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/we-dont-need-to-save-endangered-species-extinction-is-part-of-evolution/2017/11/21/57fc5658-cdb4-11e7-a1a3-0d1e45a6de3d_story.html?utm_term=.866655c57ee6)

<sup>203</sup> In this paradise world, animals will not kill and eat each other. “The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together,” Isaiah 11:6.

<sup>204</sup> “In nature, the usual selecting agent is direct, stark and simple. It is the grim reaper . . . nonrandom death is all it takes to select phenotypes, and hence the genes that they contain.” Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, 87–88.

<sup>205</sup> One can speculate that the path of life leads to heaven (i.e., eternal life) and the path of death, without repentance, can lead to hell (i.e., second death or eternal death) “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

<sup>206</sup> Lord Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, Canto 56.

<sup>207</sup> While one can understand that the world of death is not God’s recommended choice for humans, is evolution with its pains and sufferings necessary in this path? “Most centrally, they (contemporary theologians) must explain why a God whose power is essentially unlimited would use such a long, pain-filled method, with all its blind-alleys, to create a world.” David Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil,” 106. Dr Hasker answered: “As

How does one get away from this world of death? Humans need to receive eternal life from the Savior, Jesus Christ. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). “The last Adam (Christ) became a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45). God provides everyone with a “way of escape” (1 Cor 10:13) through the Messiah. “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved” (John 10:9). However, we are free to choose the escape path to eternal life or we can stubbornly stay in the broad way of destruction (Matt 7:13)!

## **7.6 Conclusion.**

While God does use “evils” in this world, his intentions are always for the good of his creatures. Furthermore, he does not entice or cause them to commit evils to “help” him bring about the “ultimate good” as he can independently accomplish his purposes in total omniscience and omnipotence. In his omnibenevolence, God also endeavors to restrain evil lest humans destroy themselves on this earth.

Concerning the question of the source of evils (research sub-objective # 8), believers (as well as non-believers) can bring disasters (moral and natural) in their lives by their own actions,

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regards the possibility of a better overall plan of creation . . . there very likely *could not be* a universe with significantly different natural constants than this, in which intelligent observers could live and raise philosophical questions about its existence (emphases in original).” William Hasker, “An Open Theist View,” 75. It appears that evolution is well suited to the path of death, considering the limitations imposed by short life spans, competitions for finite resources, fickle weather patterns, changing environments, and the need for a “natural” world without God’s overt actions and “miracles.” Biologists (contrary to theologians and philosophers) appear to be satisfied with the (God-designed) evolution in this world. “Two things we *can* make of it (evolution) are that it’s simple and it’s marvelous . . . But there is something even more wondrous. We are the one creature to whom natural selection has bequeathed a brain complex enough to comprehend the laws that govern the universe. And we should be proud that we are the only species that has figured out how we came to be.” Jerry Coyne, *Why Evolution Is True*, 233.



or by their fellow creatures' evil designs. However, if and when "evils" come from God's hand, they are intended for the edification, discipline, deterrence, or rehabilitation of his followers, for their maturity that they "may share his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). For non-believers, evils are "trumpet calls" to arouse them from their complacency and insistence on ignoring God's existence. The final destiny of heaven (living in God's presence) or hell (living without God's presence) is determined by humans endowed with free will by their omnibenevolent creator.

In answer to the final research question of the believers' "union with God" (sub-objective # 9 of the research project), the "Tough-love Proposal" advocates that impeccability and union with the Trinity are accomplished through the marriage of Christ (the second person of the Trinity) and the Church (i.e., the body of believers). "The two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31–32). Believers (i.e., the body of Christ, the Church) will be *one with Christ* in an everlasting bond of matrimony and will thus share all the divine attributes (e.g., impeccability). Professor John Murray affirmed that "union with Christ is the *central truth* of the whole doctrine of salvation (emphasis mine)"<sup>208</sup> Thus, "we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17), in an eternal love relationship with him (Romans 8:37–39).

In the next chapter, we will summarize our findings, and recap the answers we have given to the nine research questions posed at the beginning of this project. We will maintain that the "Tough-love Proposal," a novel theodicy, is worthy of consideration as it provides a morally justifying reason for God to allow evil and a reasonable answer to Rowe's "Evidential Problem of Evil."

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<sup>208</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 170.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this research project was to provide a *novel theodicy*, a satisfactory answer to Dr. William Rowe’s “Evidential Argument from Evil”<sup>1</sup> (especially its “Theological Premise” that the Omnigod would prevent *all* gratuitous evils), a task that has yet to be successfully accomplished by previous efforts by various scholars (e.g., Alvin Plantinga, John Hick, and Richard Swinburne). Commenting on the state of the current situation, Dr. Nick Trakakis wrote: “The problem of evil often strikes people as *irresolvable*. No adequate or convincing solution to the problem seems forthcoming, and this despite numerous and often sophisticated attempts over the centuries and from highly trained and gifted philosophers and theologians (emphasis in original).”<sup>2</sup>

In chapter one, we identified nine sub-objectives that would help us meet our desired purpose. The proposed novel theodicy had to achieve the following goals (pages 7–8):

1. To defend the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God in the presence of “gratuitous” evil.
2. To suggest a probable reason (a morally justifying reason) for the existence of horrendous and “gratuitous” evils in the world.
3. To show that humans are responsible for the evils (“gratuitous” or otherwise) in this realm.

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<sup>1</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” 335–41.

<sup>2</sup> Nick Trakakis, “Anti-theodicy,” 94.

4. To provide a satisfactory answer to Rowe's "Evidential Argument from Evil."
5. To meet the requirements of a "successful" theodicy.
6. To present a rationale for God's creation of an imperfect human, capable of committing evils.
7. To explain that God deals differently with theists versus non-theists.
8. To clarify the sources of moral and natural evils (e.g., from God or humans).
9. To suggest a way for believers to attain "union with God."

We proposed a research methodology to accomplish our primary objective of developing a novel theodicy and to provide answers for nine questions concerning Rowe's "Evidential Argument from Evil." We included a broad literature review of the problem and applied logical principles (i.e., a syllogism in deductive reasoning) to formulate an argument for the existence of God and evil (gratuitous or otherwise). In the section for non-theists, in deference to Rowe's requirement for "Restricted Standard Theism,"<sup>3</sup> support for the premises of the argument were drawn from findings in other fields of knowledge (e.g., cultures, eastern as well as western, child rearing, social work, economics, criminal justice, altruism, organizational management, government, psychology, education . . . ) without using any religious material. As explained in our research methodology, case studies were used to illustrate concepts (e.g., moral and natural evils) and support the overall argument (e.g., The case of the scientist Ludwig Boltzmann was provided to support the first premise of the argument, that God disapproves of humans claiming that he does not exist). In the section for theists, besides the use of data from other areas of human scholarship (e.g., medicine, history, cultures . . . ) and the relevant case studies (e.g., The

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<sup>3</sup> "Restricted theism is the view that  $\theta$  (an omnipotent, omniscient, omnigood being who created the world) exists, unaccompanied by other, independent religious claims." William Rowe, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra," 95.

case of King Saul was discussed to support the argument for “tough-love”), our research methodology included religious material (e.g., The Bible, writings from theologians) to answer questions that are often raised by Christian theists (e.g., How can believers gain “impeccability” and “union with God” in heaven?). We followed the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics (i.e., interpretation using lexical data, grammatical data, historical and cultural backgrounds, near and broader contexts),<sup>4</sup> a commonly used method to interpret Christian Scriptures.<sup>5</sup>

In chapter two, we reviewed the previous solutions suggested by philosophers and theologians. While Dr. Plantinga’s “Free Will Defense”<sup>6</sup> could satisfactorily answer Dr. J. L. Mackie’s “Logical Problem of Evil”<sup>7</sup> (at least for most scholars),<sup>8</sup> it was inadequate against Dr. William Rowe’s “Evidential Problem of Evil,”<sup>9</sup> a newer and more sophisticated version of the problem. Scholars have attempted to counter Rowe’s two premises: the Factual Premise (i.e., “There are gratuitous evils”) and the Theological Premise (i.e., “God prevents all gratuitous evils”).

In answer to Rowe’s Factual Premise, Dr. Stephen Wykstra suggested a “Skeptical Theism Defense,”<sup>10</sup> claiming that Rowe’s inductive argument (from P to Q) was faulty, since

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Sexton observed: “The historical-grammatical method is the established hermeneutical method of evangelicals.” Jason Sexton, “Emerging Church Hermeneutics and the Historical-Grammatical Method,” 158. See Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*. Also see Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. The “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” signed by noted evangelicals stated: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.” Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy*, 497.

<sup>6</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*.

<sup>7</sup> J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” 200–12.

<sup>8</sup> “Many theists and non-theists came to agree that the free will defense shows that the logical argument against theism, as exemplified in Mackie, fails.” Michael Peterson, “Introduction,” 4.

<sup>9</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” 335–41.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Wykstra, “The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering,” 73–93.

“*No good that we know of*” did not necessarily infer ‘*no good at all*,’ a problematic “noseeum” assumption.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the “Skeptical Theism Defense” had its own problems, as shown by Dr. William Hasker’s observation that the probability of the “very large number of apparently unjustified evils” being *all* justified (i.e., there is *no* gratuitous evil) was vanishingly small,<sup>12</sup> thus supporting Rowe’s argument in the “Factual Premise” that there *are* gratuitous evils. Furthermore, Dr. Wykstra’s “Skeptical Theism Defense” was just that, a *defense*, as it provided no reasons to explain *why* God would allow evils in the world (except for “reasons beyond our ken”).<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Plantinga’s “Felix Culpa Theodicy,”<sup>14</sup> claiming that all the evils in this world are justified by the “incarnation and atonement” of Christ, had to surmount many problems, notably Thomas Aquinas’s assertion that “even had sin not existed, God could have become incarnate,”<sup>15</sup> and Dr. Kevin Diller’s argument that “the incarnation alone does not require suffering and evil, so neither then is evil required for enhancing the intimacy of human relationship with God.”<sup>16</sup> Dr. Plantinga conceded that “the Felix Culpa approach does not dispel all the perplexity surrounding human suffering and evil; I suppose nothing can do that.”<sup>17</sup>

Dr. John Hick’s “Soul-Making Theodicy,”<sup>18</sup> arguing that evils and sufferings are necessary (therefore not gratuitous) for the long process of spiritual maturity, a journey that will continue even in the afterlife, also encountered many criticisms. Dr. Stanley Kane countered that

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen Wykstra, “Rowe’s Noseeum Arguments from Evil,” 127.

<sup>12</sup> William Hasker, “The Open Theist Response,” 158.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Russell, “Defenseless,” 197.

<sup>14</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 363–89.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3.1.3.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin Diller, “Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good World?” 403.

<sup>17</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 386.

<sup>18</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*.

the “development of such traits as fortitude, courage, compassion”<sup>19</sup> could be accomplished without the need for horrendous moral (e.g., the Holocaust) or natural (e.g., Hurricane Katrina) evils, for example through athletic training and competition. Dr. Eleonore Stump added: “And if it is the possession rather than the manifestation of these character traits which is valued . . . then it is not clear why God could not have imparted the disposition without the evil . . . I think Hick has no good answers to these questions.”<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Richard Swinburne’s “Serious Free Will Theodicy,” positing that “serious free will” (a great good) entailed “false beliefs and bad desires”<sup>21</sup> (thus denying that there are gratuitous evils), has not garnered much acceptance by other scholars. Dr. Derk Pereboom argued that “the claim that it is more valuable than not for people to have a strong desire to abuse children for the reason that this gives them the opportunity to choose freely not to do so has no plausibility for us.”<sup>22</sup> Concerning natural evils, Dr. Eleonore Stump observed: “Contrary to Swinburne, I think that the knowledge Swinburne values does not require natural evils; it can be acquired in a number of other ways. In particular, for example, God could inform men, directly or indirectly, of the consequences of their choices . . . the world would contain ample opportunity for significant exercise of free will even without natural evil.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, despite numerous attempts by various scholars to disprove Rowe’s Factual Premise that there are gratuitous evils in the world, the issue is still alive and well.

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<sup>19</sup> G. Stanley Kane, “The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy,” 2.

<sup>20</sup> Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 397.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*.

<sup>22</sup> Derk Pereboom, “A Defense Without Free Will,” 415.

<sup>23</sup> Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 396.

Efforts have also been made to counter Rowe's "Theological Premise" that God would prevent *all* gratuitous evils. Open Theists claimed that God can (and must) exist with gratuitous evils because he gives humans (and non-human beings) free will. Dr. Greg Boyd wrote: "If the world is indeed caught up in the middle of a real war between good and evil forces, evil is to be expected – including evil that serves no higher end. For in any state of war, gratuitous evil is normative."<sup>24</sup> Dr. William Hasker argued that gratuitous evils are *necessary* to preserve human morality as the concept of evil *always* resulting in some greater good (therefore not gratuitous) will cause us to ignore preventable evils. "If I prevent some serious evil from occurring, I will actually prevent the greater good that, absent my interference, God would have brought about as a result of the evil in question. If, on the contrary, the evil would have no such good result, then God will not permit it, regardless of what I do or don't do. The fail-safe option, then, is to do nothing."<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, Open Theism has met with severe criticisms as it appeared to run counter to the orthodox understanding of God's omniscience and omnipotence. Concerning God's occasional setbacks in a "war between good and evil" resulting in gratuitous calamities, Dr. Bruce Ware averred: "A God lacking exhaustive foreknowledge is intrinsically and unavoidably fallible and faulty in making his future plans."<sup>26</sup> Dr. Eleonore Stump added: "Could one trust such a God with one's child, one's life?"<sup>27</sup> Concerning Hasker's preservation of human morality, Dr. Klaas Kraay observed: "Perhaps there are theists whose moral motivations are undermined by their belief that God prevents all gratuitous evil. But this is quite irrelevant to the

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> William Hasker, "The Open Theist Response," 160.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?" 198.

<sup>27</sup> Eleonore Stump, "Review of Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, and Mystery*," 466.

point emphasized by Hasker's critics, which is that many theists do *not* find this (emphasis in original).”<sup>28</sup>

None of the many defenses and theodicies proposed by philosophers and theologians has been successful in answering Rowe's "Evidential Argument from Evil," thus justifying the pressing need for a *novel theodicy*, a new approach to the age-old "Problem of Evil." Many theists<sup>29</sup> (myself included) do not believe that disproving Rowe's "Factual Premise" is a fruitful approach as it is exceedingly difficult (if not impossible) to *prove* that every evil in the world must lead to some "greater good" (i.e., there are *no* gratuitous evils). Rather, the search for a morally justifying reason of the existence of God in the presence of evil is a more auspicious undertaking.

As a novel theodicy has to carry the burden of proof, evidence used to bolster the argument must be acceptable to all parties. In deference to Dr. Rowe's requirement for "Restricted Standard Theism,"<sup>30</sup> the "Tough-love Proposal" *for non-theists* section did not use Scriptures (the Bible) or other religious material to support its rationale. The research questions that are of interest to non-theists (sub-objectives 1 to 5 above) were readily answered using secular facts and findings from other fields of knowledge: history, cultures (Eastern, Western, African), child rearing, social work, economics, drug rehabilitation, politics, education, psychology . . . Real-life case studies were also introduced to illustrate the various concepts under discussion.

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<sup>28</sup> Klaas J. Kraay, "God and Gratuitous evil (Part II)," 916.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Peterson, "Christian Theism and the Evidential Argument from Evil." Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War*. William Hasker, "An Adequate God."

<sup>30</sup> William Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," footnote 16, 240.



In the “Tough-love Proposal” *for theists* section, in addition to secular evidence, religious materials were used to address sub-objectives 6 to 9, the questions that are of interest to believers (e.g., How can a Christian attain impeccability in heaven in a “union with God?”).

In chapter three, we introduced the “Tough-love Proposal” for non-theists, a novel theodicy consisting of three premises leading to the conclusion that God can exist in the presence of evils (moral, natural, gratuitous, excessive . . .). The argument is valid as it is a hypothetical syllogism in logic. It is sound if the premises are true.

Support for the first premise (God, if he exists, disapproves of humans claiming that God does not exist) was drawn from the field of human psychology, recognizing that “a person’s name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language,”<sup>31</sup> that everyone wants to be acknowledged and recognized, and that “being ignored is a hurtful experience that can make you feel anxious, angry or sad.”<sup>32</sup> The case study of the physicist Ludwig Boltzmann who committed suicide after being ignored by his colleagues illustrated the dire consequences of denying someone’s existence. Thus, we should not be surprised that God wants to be acknowledged for who he is, nor should we wonder about his strong *disapproval* of the solemn and persistent assertions of his non-existence.<sup>33</sup>

The second premise (In his disapproval, God lets humans go their own way and, in love, patiently waits for them to return, an approach popularly known as ‘tough-love’) drew its support

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<sup>31</sup> Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, 117.

<sup>32</sup> Melody Causewell, “What Does It Mean to Ignore Someone?” <https://oureverydaylife.com/mean-ignore-someone-5384614.html>

<sup>33</sup> “Voltaire was simply ludicrous when he said that if god did not exist it would be necessary to invent him. The human invention of god is the problem to begin with.” Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, 96. “My title, *The God Delusion*, does not refer to the God of Einstein . . . I am talking only about *supernatural* gods . . . Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament.” Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 41. “The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men.” Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, 23.

from the field of parenting,<sup>34</sup> drug abuse recovery,<sup>35</sup> care for the homeless,<sup>36</sup> and even in the global political arena.<sup>37</sup> “Tough love,” while not uniformly successful, is often the “best hope” to lead recalcitrant people back to God, parents, and society. Horrendous evils (e.g., the Holocaust) may serve as clarion calls to bring humans to their senses, to seek help from their creator. Dr. Eleonore Stump observed: “No amount of moral or natural evil, of course, can guarantee that a man [sic] will seek God's help. If it could, the willing it produced would not be free. But evil of this sort is the best hope, I think, and maybe the only effective means, for bringing men to such a state.”<sup>38</sup> Besides a “tough-love” approach, God (contra deism) is also using other means to call humans to himself, through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, the unceasing labor of the Church, and the relentless efforts of the parachurch organizations.

The third premise (In his disapproval, God may not intervene in humans’ environment to prevent natural evils) rested on the natural, scientific laws of the universe without any interference from supernatural beings, whether God or demons.<sup>39</sup> Dr. Bruce Reichenbach stated: “Natural evils . . . are the consequences of the outworking upon sentient creatures of the natural laws according to which God’s creation operates.”<sup>40</sup> Miraculous interventions from God (if he exists) to prevent tsunamis, tornadoes, devastating floods . . . should not be presumed, nor can these evils be blamed on him. For example, Dr. Mark Molesky questioned: “How could a

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<sup>34</sup> Tracey Jensen, “Warmth and Wealth: Re-imagining Social Class in Taxonomies of Good Parenting,” *Studies in the Maternal* (2010), 2(1).

<sup>35</sup> Pauline Neff, *Tough-love: How Parents Can Deal with Drug Abuse*, Rev. ed.

<sup>36</sup> Jon Limebury and Sue Shea, “The Role of Compassion and ‘Tough-love’ in Caring for and Supporting the Homeless: Experiences from ‘Catching Lives’ Canterbury, UK.”

<sup>37</sup> Garrett Hardin, “The Toughlove Solution,” *Newsweek* Oct 26, 1981, 45.

<sup>38</sup> Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 409.

<sup>39</sup> Dr. Plantinga claimed that “much of the natural evil the world displays is due to the (free will) action of Satan and his cohorts.” Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” 377. Dr. Boyd averred that Satan’s (and demons’) free will can be implicated as the cause of gratuitous natural evil. Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*.

<sup>40</sup> Bruce Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God*, 101.

Creator, both beneficent and all-powerful, have permitted such a catastrophe (the 1755 Lisbon earthquake)?”<sup>41</sup> In the “Tough-love Proposal,” as freedom entails responsibility and consequences, humans must live and die in the environment of their own making whether it is Blessed Eden or Blighted Hades!

The conclusion of the novel theodicy that God and evil (moral, natural, gratuitous . . .) can exist together followed from the well-supported premises. The argument is valid (a hypothetical syllogism) and sound.

The first goal of this research project (i.e., To defend the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God in the presence of “gratuitous” evil) was met as evil does not rule out the existence of God. Regarding the second sub-objective, “tough love” was given as the (probable) reason<sup>42</sup> for God to allow humans to go their own way. This approach was supported by much evidence from various disciplines (e.g., psychology, economics) as well as by Christian Scriptures (e.g., Romans 1:28–31). Concerning the third question, people who deny God’s existence and insist on their independence are free to live as they see fit, resulting in good and evil for which they are *fully responsible*. The Omnigod *cannot* be blamed for the horrendous calamities in this world. Like “tough-love” parents, God does not force himself on his “prodigal sons and daughters.” Whatever decision they make, they will have to live with the consequences, whether good or evil! Thus, in chapter three, we provided cogent answers to our first three research problems.

In chapter four, addressing Rowe’s “Factual Premise” (i.e., There are gratuitous evils) of the “Evidential Problem of Evil,” we indicated that the “Tough-love Proposal” could

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<sup>41</sup> Mark Molesky, *This Gulf of Fire: The Great Lisbon Earthquake, or Apocalypse in the Age of Science and Reason*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> We are not claiming that “tough love” is God’s actual reason for allowing evils in this world.

accommodate *both* the presence or absence of “gratuitous” evils, thus obviating the need to prove or disprove the existence of some “ultimate good” (known and unknown) resulting from such calamities, an onerous and likely impossible task, as shown by the previous efforts of philosophers and theologians in the literature review section. In this stalemate of acrimonious opposing opinions, Dr. Phillip Cary bemoaned: “To affirm the existence of such evil (gratuitous evil) is, to my mind, a counsel of despair.”<sup>43</sup> In the “Tough-love Proposal,” we could say that there are possibly<sup>44</sup> some gratuitous evils in the world as God lets humans go their own way and do whatever is right in their own eyes. Thanks to the versatility of our novel theodicy, for the sake of discussion, we could grant Rowe’s “Factual Premise” that there are gratuitous evils.

We proceeded to a rebuttal of Rowe’s “Theological Premise” (i.e., God prevents *all* gratuitous evils). The “Tough-love Proposal” argued that God, in his disapproval of people’s denial of his existence, does *not* necessarily prevent all gratuitous evils since humans insist on living as they see fit and do whatever they desire. God, in “tough love,” patiently waits for them to come to their senses and return to him. Dr. Peter van Inwagen said that, after much suffering, we may become “*dissatisfied* with our state of separation from Him (emphasis in original).”<sup>45</sup> We can then decide either to return to God or to continue in our path of “freedom and independence.” The choice is ours and ours alone and so are the consequences! Contrary to Rowe, we cannot use the existence of *unhindered* “gratuitous” evils of our own making (e.g., “Sue,” “The Brothers Karamazov”)<sup>46</sup> to deny the existence of an omni-being! God, in “tough-love,” can exist in the presence of evil (gratuitous or otherwise). As the theory was supported by

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<sup>43</sup> Phillip Cary, “The Classic Response,” 133.

<sup>44</sup> We cannot be dogmatic that gratuitous evils actually exist since we are not privy to all of God’s reasons for allowing certain evils.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy,” 381.

<sup>46</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

evidence from various fields of knowledge (e.g., psychology, drug rehabilitation, economics . . .) as well as being “commonsensical,” the “Tough-love Proposal” appeared to be a *reasonable answer* to the “Evidential Problem of Evil” as presented by Dr. Rowe. Thus, we fulfilled criterion # 4, “To provide a satisfactory answer to Rowe’s “Evidential Argument from Evil.”

In chapter five, in answer to our fifth research question, we addressed the requirements raised by various philosophers and theologians for a “successful” theodicy. Dr. Feinberg’s “Logical Consistency Requirement”<sup>47</sup> was met by showing that all the propositions of the novel theodicy are logically consistent with one another and that the argument is valid in the form of a hypothetical syllogism. The “Relevancy to the Problem Requirement”<sup>48</sup> was satisfied by the versatility of the “Tough-love Proposal,” providing relevant and reasonable answers to the *various problems* of moral evil, natural evil, social evil, excessive and horrendous evil (e.g., the Holocaust), gratuitous evil, logical argument from evil, evidential argument from evil, as well as the puzzling issue of “Divine Hiddenness.” The “Relevancy to the Theology Requirement”<sup>49</sup> was answered by the morally intuitive concept of “Tough-love” that transcends many theologies (Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu)<sup>50</sup> and cultures (Eastern, Western, African)<sup>51</sup> and can thus be accepted by people of various religious and non-religious backgrounds.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> John Feinberg, “Theodicy,” 1184.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Catholicism (“Tough Love,” <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7082>); Protestantism (“Loving Your Prodigal,” <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/parenting-challenges/teen-rebellion/loving-your-prodigal/>); Buddhism (“Tough Love,” <https://www.tibetanbuddhistaltar.org/tough-love/>); Islam (“Tough Love,” <http://www.straightpathtorecovery.com/>); Hinduism (“Tough Love,” <http://indianthoughts.in/tough-love-2/>).

<sup>51</sup> Western culture (“Tough Love,” <https://www.todayschristianwoman.com/articles/2003/may/2.42.html>); Eastern culture (“It’s time for Hong Kong parents to show their offspring some tough love,” [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2017-11/13/content\\_34464387.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2017-11/13/content_34464387.htm)); African culture (“What is the Nigerian Parenting Style?” <https://lagosmums.com/what-is-the-nigerian-parenting-style/>).

<sup>52</sup> Dr. Eleonore Stump observed: “The wider worldview within which a claim is embedded matters to the evaluation of the claim. Plausibility is relative to a worldview.” Eleonore Stump, “Response to Trakakis,” 109. “Tough love” is compatible with various worldviews and is thus very plausible.

Dr. Speak's "Value Claim Requirement,"<sup>53</sup> calling for a positive balance of good over evil in a (supposedly) God-created world, was obviated by the reality that the evils on earth are human perpetrations (sub-objective # 3 above) as God may choose not to interfere with his creatures' schemes. The lack of "value" of this realm (if it so appears after human accounting) cannot be blamed on God and used as a reason to deny his goodness or existence. Do people want to have "more value" in their universe? They will simply need to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and work toward that goal for God (in their thinking) is either absent,<sup>54</sup> dead,<sup>55</sup> or non-existent,<sup>56</sup> a pure figment of one's imagination.<sup>57</sup> Dr. Speak's "Impossibility Claim Requirement"<sup>58</sup> was resolved by the "Tough-love Proposal," as it is *logically impossible* for God to give humans free will not to acknowledge his existence and at the same time insist that they believe in him or obeys his commands (e.g., "you shall not kill").<sup>59</sup> Dr. Plantinga espoused the same concept in his famous "Free Will Defense." "To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He (God) must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so."<sup>60</sup> Dr. Richard Swinburne averred: "The most obvious example of this logical straitjacket to which even God is subject is that he cannot give us very serious free will, i.e. the free will to choose between good and wrong, without the natural possibility (unprevented by God) that we will do wrong."<sup>61</sup> It is *impossible*, even for the Omnigod, to create a world of free will humans without any evil!

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<sup>53</sup> Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 96.

<sup>54</sup> Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 190.

<sup>55</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 181.

<sup>56</sup> Victor Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis*.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

<sup>58</sup> Daniel Speak, *The Problem of Evil*, 96.

<sup>59</sup> Exodus 20:13.

<sup>60</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 127.

“Tough-love” was derived from a familiar and *common-sense* approach used over the centuries in parenting, social work, economics, politics, education, psychology, drug rehabilitation, . . . Thus, it satisfied Dr. Trakakis’s “Commonsensical Views About the World”<sup>62</sup> and “Widely Accepted Scientific and Historical Views”<sup>63</sup> requirements. Furthermore, “Tough-love” emphasized *love*, a desire to help and to bring about a good resolution to problems in relationships (e.g., parent-child, husband-wife, teacher-student, coach-athlete, God-creature). It was an “Intuitively Plausible Moral Principle” that met Dr. Trakakis’s third requirement.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, the “Tough-love Proposal” addressed Rowe’s “four problems of evil requirement”<sup>65</sup> by advocating that God (if he exists), in his disapproval of humans’ denial of his existence, allowed them and their environment to go their own way, resulting in (1) many evils, (2) various kinds of evil (e.g., murders, rapes), (3) excessive amounts of evil of various kinds, and (4) horrendous particular evils (e.g., the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia). Rowe’s four “distinct problems of evil” were readily resolved by the single proposal of “tough love.” Our novel theodicy appeared to meet the many requirements suggested by various scholars, satisfying criterion # 5 of our research project, “To meet the requirements of a ‘successful’ theodicy.”

Thus, in the section for non-theists, we gave some reasonable answers to our first five research questions, using evidence from other fields of knowledge (e.g., history, psychology, economics, drug rehabilitation, politics), staying within the accepted bounds of Restricted Standard Theism,<sup>66</sup> and avoiding any reference or support from Scriptures and other religious

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<sup>62</sup> Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil.”

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> William Rowe, “Paradox and Promise: Hick’s Solution to the Problem of Evil,” 111–24.

<sup>66</sup> William Rowe, “The Empirical Argument from Evil,” footnote 16, 240.

material. In the subsequent section for Christian theists, we addressed the remaining four research problems that are of interest to believers.

Chapter six, using Christian Scriptures and other religious materials (e.g., writings of theologians), discussed the attributes of God, especially focusing on the concepts of “simplicity” and “impeccability” (inability to sin). Dr. Berkhof wrote: “From the simplicity of God, it follows that God and his attributes are one.”<sup>67</sup> God’s attribute of “impeccability” cannot be given to other beings (whether humans or angels) without making them God. The problem of God’s inability to create people with free will who never commit evil was explained by the *logical impossibility* for God to create an impeccable being (i.e., another God) for God (an uncreated being) cannot be created. Dr. Phillip Cary said: “God cannot create something uncreated. In other words, God cannot create God.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, we presented “a rationale for God’s creation of an *imperfect* human capable of committing evils” (our sixth research question). Concerning the seventh sub-objective, God does *not* behave in the same way with believers versus non-believers. For those who are willing to acknowledge God and accept his offer of substitution and salvation, he pledges that “all things will work together for good” (Romans 8:28), and that no harm can befall them unless it is brought on by their own unwise actions against God’s commands. Thus, we added statement (5) to the “Tough-love Proposal,” a promise for Christian theists: “*If a person returns, God promises to make all things work together for good for that person.*” In trials and temptations, God provides a “way of escape” for believers (1 Corinthians 10:13). If they fail and sin, God forgives them when they repent (1 John 1:9). God endeavors to help them grow, mature and to become more like Christ (Romans 8:29). Dr. Millard Erickson averred: “While

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<sup>67</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 44.

<sup>68</sup> Phillip Cary, “A Classic View,” 21.



sanctification is exclusively of God, the believer is constantly exhorted to work and to grow in the matters pertaining to salvation.”<sup>69</sup>

That brought us to the eight question (Chapter seven), what are the sources of evils in our lives? For believers as well as non-believers, (moral and natural) evils may come from our own hands and from other people’s twisted actions. “Evils” from God’s hands are not evil as they are meant, in “tough love,” to bring non-theists back into a relationship with him. God may also use “evils” to edify, discipline, deter, or rehabilitate his children. “For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?” (Hebrews 12:7). The goal of the omnibenevolent God is to bring his children to maturity, that they may live in loving fellowship with him for eternity (i.e., heaven). Dr. Wayne Grudem affirmed: “After the final judgment, believers will enter into the full enjoyment of life in the presence of God forever.”<sup>70</sup>

Finally, the problem of an eventual “union with God” (Sub-objective # 9) for believers was resolved by the scriptural doctrine of the “marriage of the Lamb” to his bride (i.e., the Church). Children of God can look forward to a future marriage feast where they will be united forever with their Lord and share his holiness and *impeccability*, away from the presence of sin, death, and evil (Revelation 21:4). Dr. Millard Erickson said: “The presence of the perfectly holy God and the spotless Lamb means that there will be no sin or evil of any kind (in heaven).”<sup>71</sup> Believers will be with God and live in peace and holiness for eternity.

In summary, the “Tough-love Proposal” affirmed that humans are now in God’s non-recommended path, the path/world of death where they are free to deny God’s existence and

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<sup>69</sup> Millard Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 376.

<sup>70</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1158.

<sup>71</sup> Millard Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 471.

perpetrate whatever horrendous and *gratuitous* evils their hearts desire (e.g., the Holocaust). However, in his love, grace, and mercy, God has provided a redeemer, Jesus Christ, to bring them into a relationship with their creator. Over the centuries, God has been calling them back to him through the persistent promptings of the Holy Spirit (contra deism) and the tireless efforts of his people (i.e., the Church). However, people are free to accept Christ's sacrifice (and substitution) on the cross or to persist in their claim of God's non-existence. The choice is theirs and theirs alone!

The "Tough-love Proposal" obviated the need to prove or disprove the existence of "gratuitous evils" (e.g., the "Skeptical Theism Defense").<sup>72</sup> It sidestepped the troubling issue of asserting the "greater worth" of (God-given) free will over the innumerable miseries in this fallen world<sup>73</sup> (e.g., Plantinga's "Free Will Defense").<sup>74</sup> It removed the necessity to posit a painful and torturous "Irenaean" path to an eventual spiritual maturity in the afterlife (e.g., Hick's "Soul Making" theodicy).<sup>75</sup> It forestalled the requirement to enumerate all the possible goods and evils in this realm and compare their respective values (e.g., Swinburne's "Serious Free Will" theodicy).<sup>76</sup> It precluded the obligation to decipher God's reasons (if that can ever be done) for allowing such and such calamity when the omnipotent Lord can (and does occasionally) intervene to prevent some evils (e.g., The Open Theism theodicy).<sup>77</sup> It rendered moot the controversial use of advanced mathematics and complex statistics in theology (e.g., Rowe's

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<sup>72</sup> Stephen Wysktra, "A Skeptical Theist View."

<sup>73</sup> Dr. Trakakis affirmed: "Suffering is always the condition of the fallen world, *not the way God wanted the world to be* (emphases in original)." Nick Trakakis, "Response to Stump," 32. In the "Tough-love Proposal," this fallen world is *not* God's recommended path. It is the forbidden "world of death."

<sup>74</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*.

<sup>75</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*.

<sup>77</sup> "The fact is that very often we *just do not know* why certain sorts of evil are permitted by God (emphases in original)." William Hasker, "An Open Theist View," 76. Dr. Thomas Jay Oord observed: "All of this means that Hasker eventually appeals to mystery." Thomas Jay Oord, "The Essential Kenosis Response," 164.

Bayesian approach<sup>78</sup> or Tooley’s Carnapian argument).<sup>79</sup> More importantly, the “Tough-love Proposal” removed the temptation to *deny* God’s absolute omnipotence, unlimited omniscience, and infinite omnibenevolence (basic tenets of traditional Christianity),<sup>80</sup> as recently advocated by the proponents of a radical “reconceptualizing” of the orthodox God.<sup>81</sup>

The “Tough-love Proposal” met the goal of this research project, i.e., to provide a *novel theodicy* that successfully resolves Rowe’s “Evidential Problem of Evil.” Reasonable answers were given for all nine sub-objectives: (1) to defend the existence of God in the presence of evil by (2) providing a morally justifying reason (“tough-love”), (3) to hold humans responsible for the evils in the world, (4) to challenge Rowe’s Theological Premise, (5) to meet the requirements for a “successful” theodicy, (6) to explain the creation of a *peccable* human being, (7) to differentiate God’s dealings with theists versus non-theists, (8) to clarify the sources of evil in this world, and (9) to propose a way for believers to attain impeccability and “union with God.”

Concerning a “successful” philosophical argument and a “successful” novel theodicy, Dr. Peter van Inwagen advocated: “So we have a criterion of philosophical success. An argument for *p* is a success just in the case that it can be used, under ideal circumstances, to convert an audience of ideal agnostics (agnostics with respect to *p*) to belief in *p* — in the presence of an ideal opponent of belief in *p*.”<sup>82</sup> It is our belief that the “Tough-love Proposal,” with its valid logical argument (a hypothetical syllogism) and its well-supported premises, using evidence

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<sup>78</sup> William Rowe, “The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look,” 262–85.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Tooley, “Inductive Logic and the Probability that God Exists: Farewell to Skeptical Theism,” 144–64.

<sup>80</sup> We believe that the “Tough-love Proposal” satisfies the “criteria for evaluation” for a theodicy as advocated by Dr. Søvik. “I have therefore chosen coherence (consistency, cohesiveness, and comprehensiveness) as a criterion of truth, and *authenticity as a criterion of whether a theodicy is Christian* (emphases mine)” Atle Søvik, *The Problem of Evil and the Power of God*, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Andrei Buckareff and Yugin Nagasawa (eds.), *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*.

<sup>82</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, 47.

drawn from various fields of knowledge (e.g., psychology, economics, history) as well as from Christian Scriptures, will successfully rise to Dr. Inwagen's challenge!

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