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### A Critique of the Free Will Defense, A Comprehensive Look at Alvin Plantinga's Solution To the Problem of Evil.

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University of New Hampshire  
Department of Philosophy  
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# A Critique of the Free Will Defense

*A Comprehensive Look at Alvin Plantinga's Solution  
To the Problem of Evil.*

by  
Justin Ykema

Primary Reader: Jennifer Armstrong  
Additional Readers: Willem deVries, Paul McNamara & Ruth Sample

Gratias tibi ago, domine.  
Haec credam a deo pio, a deo justo, a deo scito?  
Cruciatus in crucem.  
Tuus in terra servus, nuntius fui; officium perfeci.  
Cruciatus in crucem. Eas in crucem.

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## Section I: Introduction

Historically, the problem of evil exemplifies an apparent paradox. The paradox is, if God exists, and he is all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, how does evil exist in the world when God created everything the world contains? Many theologians have put forth answers to solve this problem, and one of the proposed solutions put forth is the celebrated Free Will Defense, which claims to definitively solve the problem of evil. This defense is not a solution. Alvin Plantinga's version of the defense is a famous attempt on the problem of evil; it just doesn't solve anything because of several flaws I will demonstrate. I will briefly review the historical background of the current framework of the problem, to put Plantinga's work in context. Then I will restate and explain Plantinga's Free Will Defense, and show that it has two logical flaws, it incorrectly attributes value to freedom, and it does not sufficiently address the problem of natural evil.

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## Section II: Historical Context

Scottish philosopher, David Hume describes the complexities of God when he recalls metaphysician Nicolas Malebranche's view of God's divine property of aseity:

“He is a Being infinitely perfect—of this we cannot doubt...So neither ought we to imagine that the spirit of God has human ideas or bears any resemblance to our spirit, under color that we know nothing more perfect than a human mind. We ought rather to believe that as he comprehends the perfections of matter without being material...That his true name is *He that is*, or, in other words, Being without restriction, All Being, the Being infinite and universal.”<sup>1</sup>

This description of God establishes his very existence, as he exists in and of himself. God is, the highest degree of intrinsically good property; the ultimate being of perfection, and he is also a

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion Second Edition*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 13-14.

being worthy of worship. There is, however, a slight bleeding together of the ideas of perfection and having no limitations or restrictions. This could lead to confusion, but Hume's other character, Philo, responds appropriately;

“But surely, where reasonable men treat these subjects, the question can never be concerning the *being* but only the *nature* of the Deity. The former truth, as you well observe, is unquestionable and self-evident. Nothing exists without a cause; and the original cause of this universe (whatever it be) we call *God*, and piously ascribe to him every species of perfection.”<sup>2</sup>

This idea of perfection is important. The traditional idea of God includes many traits and because of these, many consider this God to be perfect, and a being worthy of worship, something the problem of evil vehemently denies.

The problem of evil recognizes three traditional traits for God: omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence. Unfortunately, the meanings of these terms have been debated and disputed since the problem of evil first arose, and there have been historical disagreements over what they mean, so no real solid definition has been agreed upon for how these terms should be defined or understood. However, in order to give the argument structure, we must at this moment give them definitions. In this case then, I define ‘omniscience’ as the capacity for God to know, comprehend, and understand all truths. ‘Omnibenevolence’ is the characteristic that God is morally good and wishes the best for everything. ‘Omnipotence’ is the ability for God to do any action he wishes to do, within logical constraints, for example God can part the Red Sea, but He cannot create square circles.

Evil is something that also needs to be dissected further to comprehend this problem. Evil is generally defined as pain and suffering and should be broken into two separate categories: moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil is the pain and suffering that comes from acts of free will and the consequences of those actions, whether they are intentional or accidental. An example of

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<sup>2</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 14.

moral evil would be the suffering that results from murder. Natural evil is pain and suffering that arises from events that are not caused by any human or act of free will, for example, the suffering that comes from tornados, earthquakes, or cancer. I will treat moral and natural evil as two distinct classes of evil, but I will combine them under the term 'evil' unless otherwise specified.

Hume's poet, Demea says:

"The whole earth, believe me, *Philo*, is cursed and polluted. A perpetual war is kindled amongst all living creatures. Necessity, hunger, want stimulate the strong and courageous: fear, anxiety, terror agitate the weak and infirm. The first entrance into life gives anguish to the new-born infant and to its wretched parents: weakness, impotence, distress attend each stage of that life, and it is, at last, finished in agony and horror."<sup>3</sup>

Philo continues,

"Man, it is true, can, by combination, surmount all his *real* enemies and become master of the whole animal creation: But does he not immediately raise up to himself imaginary enemies, the demons of his fancy, who haunt him with superstitious terrors and blast every enjoyment of life? His pleasure, as he imagines, becomes in their eyes a crime: His food and repose give them umbrage and offence; his very sleep and dreams furnish new materials to anxious fear: And even death, his refuge from every other ill, presents only the dread of endless and innumerable woes. Nor does the wolf molest more the timid flock than superstition does the anxious breast of wretched mortals.

...Man is the greatest enemy of man. Oppressions, injustice, contempt, contumely, violence, sedition, war, calumny, treachery, fraud; by these they mutually torment each other, and they would soon dissolve that society which they formed were it not for the dread of still greater ills which must attend their separation."<sup>4</sup>

One of the earliest manifestations of the problem of evil was from the ancient Greek philosopher, Epicurus, who looked at the character of God in general, and began to fully articulate the problem of evil. His argument sums up very plainly what the problem of evil is all about.

"Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, but does not want to, he is

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<sup>3</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Page 60.

wicked. If God can abolish evil, and God really wants to do it, why is there evil in the world?"<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, Epicurus' question does not mention omniscience. Hume addresses Epicurus's exact question.

"His power, we allow, is infinite; whatever he wills is executed: But neither man nor any other animal is happy; therefore, he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite; He is never mistaken in choosing the means to any end; But the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity: Therefore, it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and his mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?

Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered.

Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?"<sup>6</sup>

Other theists and philosophers have stated the problem of evil very simply. The problem reads,

- (1) God exists and is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient.
- (2) Evil exists.<sup>7</sup>

The contemporary Australian philosopher, J. L. Mackie expresses that there is a "quasi-logical"<sup>8</sup> relation between the properties that creates the inconsistency between (1) and (2). Mackie understands that our regular conception of God must change.

"...the problem will not arise if one gives up at least one of the propositions that constitute it. If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> James Haught, *2000 Years of Disbelief: Famous People with the Courage to Doubt*, (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1996), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 63.

<sup>7</sup> This is known as the Inconsistent Tetrad.

<sup>8</sup> Marilyn Adams, and Robert Adams, *The Problem of Evil*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 26.

<sup>9</sup> Mackie, J.L. University of Sydney, "Evil and Omnipotence." Accessed March 5, 2013. <http://www.ditext.com/mackie/evil.html>.

This general and basic understanding of the logical problem of evil is as follows,

(1) God is all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing.

(2) Evil exists.

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(3) Therefore, evil or God doesn't exist.

This is where the problem of evil starts to take different forms based on who is trying to solve it. Evidence seems to almost completely be on the side of evil existing, so most theologians find themselves at a loss because they cannot accept that God doesn't exist, so instead, they try to reconcile evil and its existence with God's three divine traits. American philosopher Alvin Plantinga began to address the logical form of the problem in a unique way with his version of the Free Will Defense.

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### Section III: Plantinga's Free Will Defense

Plantinga starts his defense by addressing concerns from J.L. Mackie. Plantinga starts at the very foundations of theological thinking: evil. The world has vast amounts of it. Hume seems to capture in all honesty our inner struggle with the different kinds of evil the world possesses. Plantinga tries to explore why God might allow evil, and it is in this explanation that Plantinga separates himself from most other theists in history. Most theists attempting to show compatibility put forth a theodicy, or an explanation as to why God allows evil. Plantinga puts forth a defense, which is the mere possibility of a theodicy.

With a defense, Plantinga just has to show that it is at least possible for there to be a reason why something might be the way it is. A defense is the mere possibility of a theodicy. Plantinga says, "No doubt the theists would rather know what God's reasoning *is* for permitting evil than simply that it's a possibility that He has a good one. But in this present context...the latter is all that's necessary."<sup>12</sup>

Allow me to build on this, as it is an important distinction to make. The medieval philosopher, Saint Augustine, is one of the most important theologians who put forth a theodicy. He claims that freedom is a gift from God, and it's better to use that freedom to go away and return to God, than to never be given freedom at all. It is this freedom that makes humans great and worthy of God.

...A runaway horse is better than a stone which does not run away because it lacks self-movement and sense perception, so the creature is more excellent which sins by free will than that which does not sin only because it has no free will.”<sup>10</sup>

This is a theodicy or reason why God has allowed sinning. Plantinga doesn't adopt this strategy or think that he has to show intent or why God allows anything. Plantinga ignores theodicies, and puts forth a defense that shows there is not in fact an inconsistency with God and evil. Plantinga starts with a formula for the problem of evil to show his point.

- (1) God is omnipotent.
- (2) God is wholly good.
- (3) Evil exists.<sup>11</sup>

Plantinga accepts these three premises to start. He says this set is not contradictory or inconsistent as no two premises negate a third; the set is not explicitly or formally contradictory. Plantinga thinks that critics are stating that there is a contradiction here, but Plantinga thinks that if there is one at all, it's not clear. So to show this, Plantinga tries to draw out what he thinks the atheologist's position is. Mackie originally states:

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

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<sup>10</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 27.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Page 13



propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.”<sup>12</sup>

So now Plantinga adds,

(4) A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.

(5) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.<sup>13,14</sup>

Adding this hopefully creates a formal contradiction. But Plantinga argues this is still not the case. To make this point explicit, consider (5); from the earlier definition of omnipotence, we note that there are logical limitations to what an omnipotent being can do. This being cannot create square circles or other nonsensical things.<sup>15</sup>

Plantinga goes on to scrutinize (4) as well. Plantinga gives the example of someone being fully able to help someone else in trouble. However, the person able to help can only help those in trouble if he/she is aware of them being in trouble. Not helping with something that you don't know about certainly doesn't count against your goodness. Plantinga must add something so that God is aware of what is happening in the world so that he may help. So Plantinga suggests a modification to (4) which I will call (4a). It reads:

(4a) Every good thing always eliminates every evil that it *knows about* and can eliminate.<sup>16</sup>

Still there is no formal contradiction here unless God knows about every state of affairs, which most theologians do agree upon. If Plantinga adds,

(6) God is omniscient<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Adams and Adams, *The Problem of Evil*, 26-27.

<sup>13</sup> The premise numbers Plantinga uses differ from my own, but the wording is the same.

<sup>14</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that thinkers such as Martin Luther, Descartes, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and others all thought that there were no logical limits to God. To them, whether the set is contradictory or not is of no interest, because God, being able to go beyond the rules of logic, can make the set consistent if he wishes. This is an interesting fact but of no use to use beyond this point.

<sup>16</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* 18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Page 19.

then he has a formally contradictory set. But Plantinga goes back to criticizing (4a) with two examples. In the first example Plantinga gives the example of someone who knows the location of separate people in trouble, but because of their separate locations the person able to help can only save one of the people in trouble. It just wasn't in that person's power to eliminate all the evils in this situation. In Plantinga's second example he imagines someone who has pain in his leg and the only way the doctor can help to stop the pain is to amputate the leg. So again Plantinga must reformulate (4a) to (4b):

(4b) A good being eliminates every evil *E* that it knows about and that it can eliminate without either bringing about a greater evil or eliminating a good state of affairs that outweighs *E*.<sup>18</sup>

Again, Plantinga gives an example of being in a mountain climbing party. You find out about two stranded mountain climbers that are far apart. You can rescue each one but not both, as rescuing both would mean that your climbing party would be on the mountain too long and the approaching storm would reach and kill everyone. Here again Plantinga regroups and replaces (4b) with (4c) and it reads,

(4c) An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate.<sup>19</sup>

So now we have the set  $A = \{(1), (2), (3), (4c), (5), \text{ and } (6)\}$ . Now if this set were formally contradictory, any five of these premises would require the negation of the sixth. So, if this set were formally inconsistent then the denial of (3) would be found in the other five premises, which would entail,

(3') There is no evil.<sup>20</sup>

But instead Plantinga claims that it only entails,

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<sup>18</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Page 21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Page 22.

(3'') There is no evil that God can properly eliminate.<sup>21</sup>

In this case there is no formal contradiction. So to create a formal contradiction Plantinga must add (7) which reads,

(7) If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs.<sup>22</sup>

Plantinga again denies that the set is now contradictory, because he claims that,

“...there are people who display a sort of creative moral heroism in the face of suffering and adversity—a heroism that inspires others and creates a good situation out of a bad one. In a situation like this the evil, of course, remains evil; but the total state of affairs—someone’s bearing pain magnificently, for example—may be good. If it is, then the good present must outweigh the evil; otherwise the total situation would not be *good*.”<sup>23</sup>

This impasse now is much more difficult to overcome. Plantinga concludes,

“One wonders, therefore, why the many atheologians who confidently assert that this set is contradictory make no attempt to *show* that it is. For the most part they are content just to *assert* that there is a contradiction.”<sup>24</sup>

And,

“...Although many atheologians claim that the theist is involved in contradiction when he asserts the members of set A, this set, obviously, is neither *explicitly* nor *formally* contradictory; the claim, presumably, must be that it is *implicitly* contradictory.”<sup>25</sup>

Plantinga wonders if anyone can even go further from this point. But instead of advancing this argument, Plantinga instead now tries to show that set A is not contradictory by erecting a new logical set of premises:

- (1) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.
- (2) Evil exists.
- (3) God creates a world containing evil and has a good reason for doing so.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* 22.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Page 22.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Page 23.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Page 23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Page 24.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Page 26.

Plantinga endorses this new proof because it reconciles (1) and (2). Here is where Plantinga moves away from the traditional problem of evil and starts to formulate his version to solve. Plantinga again address the idea of theodicies to do this. A traditional theodicy in this case will show us what God's reason is for allowing evil, but Plantinga's defense will show what could possibly be a reason for allowing evil. To Plantinga a theodicy goes above what is required of someone to prove; however, he recognizes in a religious context why a theodicy is much more appealing and comforting than a defense. Plantinga's Free Will Defense goes as follows:

“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. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.”<sup>27</sup>

To establish his defense more thoroughly, Plantinga defines freedom, and adds three complimentary elements: counterfactuals, Leibniz's Lapse, and transworld depravity, which will be covered a little later. Plantinga introduces a definition of freedom by responding to Mackie. The objection to Plantinga's defense is that, if God is omnipotent, then why couldn't God have created a world in which there are free creatures, who can choose both evil and good but always freely chose good? As Mackie states:

“If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical

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<sup>27</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 166-167.

impossibility in his freely choosing between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong.”<sup>28</sup>

Here Plantinga makes an important distinction, concerning what freedom is. According to Plantinga, “...a person is free with respect to an action *A* at a time *t* only if no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he performs *A* at *t* or that he refrains from doing so.”<sup>29</sup> Plantinga continues, “What God thought good, on this view, was the existence of creatures whose activity is not causally determined—who, like himself, are centers of creative activity. The freedom of such creatures will no doubt be limited by causal laws and antecedent conditions.”<sup>30</sup> Plantinga explains that while casual laws no doubt limit how fast he can run, they also enhance him because he can, in fact, walk. He summarizes, “But if I am free with respect to an action *A*, then causal laws and antecedent conditions determine neither that I take *A* nor that I refrain.”<sup>31</sup> Plantinga also adds,

“Freedom so conceived is not to be confused with unpredictability. You might be able to predict what you will do in a given situation even if you are free, in that situation, to do something else. If I know you well, I may be able to predict what action you will take in response to a certain set of conditions; it does not follow that you are not free with respect to that action.”<sup>32</sup>

With Plantinga’s notion of freedom explained, the original question that Mackie raises comes back into focus: why can God not create a world in which all God’s creatures do only what is right? In response, Plantinga introduces Leibniz’s Lapse and counterfactuals. To set up his defense Plantinga recognizes the objection Mackie makes. Plantinga states:

“Surely it is possible to do only what is right, even if one is free to do wrong. It is *possible*, in the broadly logical sense, that there be a world containing free creatures who always do what is right. There is a certainly no *contradiction* or *inconsistency* in this idea. But God is omnipotent; his power has no nonlogical

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<sup>28</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 167-168.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Page 170-171.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Page 171.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Page 171.

<sup>32</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 29-30.

limitations. So if it's possible that there be a world containing creatures who are free to do what is wrong but never in do so, then it follows that an omnipotent God could create such a world.”<sup>33</sup>

This objection calls into question why God can create any possible world but didn't create one where humans always do good. Since that seems logical and God has no nonlogical limits, then God should create that world.

Before going into the possibility of different worlds, Plantinga pauses to look at the concept of creating worlds. Plantinga generally thinks we are mistaken when we talk about God creating the world, because what we mean to say is God creates any state of affairs, or what Plantinga calls  $\alpha$  or all states of possible affairs. To create something, to Plantinga, is to say that at one time the thing you created did not exist, and since the world is part of  $\alpha$ , or all states of affairs, then there is no time at which it didn't exist. What God does instead of creating the world is God actualizes a state of affairs within  $\alpha$ . And while we say that God actualizes something within  $\alpha$ , he does not actualize every state of affairs within it. Also God doesn't create himself or his own properties, numbers, and other things, as these things have no beginning, and to say that they exist now, is to say that at one point they didn't exist, and this to Plantinga seems clearly false. What God does instead is chose which among contingent states of affairs in  $\alpha$  to actualize. Only contingent states of affairs, not necessary states of affairs are not the result of God. With this in mind, Plantinga asks 'what worlds can God actually actualize'?

Plantinga doesn't think it's possible for God to create every world. In one example, it's not possible for God to create a world in which he is not actual. Plantinga doesn't agree with the German philosopher and mathematician, G.W. Leibniz. Leibniz thought that before creating the universe, God had an array of all possible worlds to choose from, and so God chose the best of

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<sup>33</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 32.

all possible worlds. Plantinga does not raise the typical objections to Leibniz, but instead he refutes the idea that God could have created any given logically possible world.

For example, Pope Adrian VI was the only Dutch pope in the history of the Catholic Church. He was a rather conservative pope as well. He was deeply upset about the nudity portrayed on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In order to solve this problem he wanted to paint the Sistine Chapel white.

Now we have a state of affairs  $S$  that contains all the situations: Adriaan Florenszoon Boeyens being pope, the pope being conservative, nudity on the Sistine Chapel, and everything else in the world up until time  $t$ . Now Leibniz says God can create any possible world. In  $S$  up until time  $t$  when Adrian VI could choose to paint or not paint the Sistine Chapel, Adrian is free in respect to painting and to refrain from painting. So if  $S$  is actualized,

(1) Pope Adrian VI will paint the Sistine Chapel.

or

(2) Pope Adrian VI will not paint the Sistine Chapel.

Either (1) is true or (2) is true<sup>34</sup>, and God knows which conditional is true. So let's assume that (2) is true and that the pope decides not to paint the ceiling. Plantinga thinks that if that is the case then it was not in God's power to create worlds that contain  $S$  and yet the pope chooses (1). If God makes the pope paint the ceiling then he was not free to paint the ceiling. Even though (1) is a plausible world scenario, and it's logically possible, and God is omnipotent, it is not within his power to actualize such a world. Plantinga says,

“Mackie...agrees with Leibniz in insisting that if (as the theist holds) God is omnipotent, then it follows that He could have created any possible world he pleased. We now see that this contention—call it “Leibniz’ Lapse”—is a mistake. The atheologian is right in holding that there are many possible worlds containing

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<sup>34</sup> Plantinga takes for granted the idea that there are some future contingent truths, and that this is not contradictory with free will.

moral good but no moral evil; his mistake lies in endorsing Leibniz's Lapse. So one of his premises—that God, if omnipotent, could have actualized just any world He pleased—is false.”<sup>35</sup>

The point of Leibniz's Lapse is to show that if, in fact, (1) is true, God could not go back in time in *S* to time *t* and get a different result from (1). So someone could then ask if (2) was even a possible world, and to that the answer is yes and no. It is possible in the sense that nothing is preventing it from happening, but it wouldn't happen because of the circumstances leading up to time *t* in *S*. I don't think there's any reason to think, based on Plantinga's argument so far, that if you took the same situation over and over again, you would get different results.

In Leibniz's Lapse we are introduced to counterfactuals of freedom. These are situations in which someone exists in and is free to do or not do an action in that situation. The counterfactual is the framework to the entire idea that Adrian VI was free in *S* and if in *S* he would do (2). So now we can take these two concepts and combine them, and again move forward with Plantinga's Free Will Defense. “God though omnipotent, could not have created just any possible world he pleases.”<sup>36</sup> To prove this, Plantinga makes two strong points. He claims that God cannot be the cause of the world, and he introduces his famous theory, transworld depravity.

God at first has two distinct choices to make. He can strongly or weakly actualize a world. To strongly actualize a world is to be the cause of that world and everything in it, whereas to weakly actualize a world would just mean to bring it into existence and not be the sole cause of everything that happens in that world.

The term 'cause' here is relating to what God actually makes happen. Although God gives humans freedom, he doesn't cause anything that the creatures do with it. What God did

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<sup>35</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 44.

<sup>36</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 168.



was create the Heavens and the Earth, and that resulted in the actuality of specific circumstances. He actualized the world we live in now from a multitude of possible worlds. He did not create it.

Keeping that in mind, Plantinga also gives humans freedom. Now God can strongly actualize a world in which all the creatures perform an action, but this is a problem for Plantinga. “According to Plantinga, to strongly actualize some state of affairs is to be the cause of that state. So if God were to strongly actualize that human beings chose to do something, then God would be causing them to do it, and Plantinga believes that is incompatible with freedom.”<sup>37</sup> So if God cannot strongly actualize a world in which his free creatures do all good things, then he must weakly actualize such a world, that is, create a world in which his creatures are free in relation to actions and then do good freely. In these weakly actualized worlds, God’s creatures are free to perform or refrain from actions and nothing is determining their actions.

God can make most strongly and weakly actualized worlds. Here we must make explicitly clear the difference between weakly and strongly actualized worlds, as this distinction is imperative for understanding the main flaw in the Free Will Defense. Using the real world example of the assassination attempt of John Paul II by Mehmet Ali Ağca in 1981, we can understand the clear distinction between these two types of worlds. God, in a weakly actualized world, makes Ağca free to do or not do the assassination. Ağca is of course influenced by outside forces such as his own emotions and physics, but at all times he is free in respect to that action, in that there is nothing forcing him to do or not do the assassination; he does the killing freely. If Ağca were in a strongly actualized world, it would have been caused from the creation of the world that he does or does not do the assassination attempt. God would have caused the event to happen or not happen from the creation of the world, and this is incompatible with free will, because Ağca is not free in respect to that action, even though he may think he is. This is

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<sup>37</sup> Geirsson and Losonsky, “Plantinga and The Problem of Evil”, 1-2.

why God cannot make people choose good over evil. They must cause that action themselves, independent of the causality of God, and yet limited by physical laws of the world. This reason is why God can only weakly actualize such a world.

At this point there are many weakly actualizable worlds for God to actualize. Of these weakly actualizable worlds, there is one world where humans choose less good and more evil, just as there is also a world where humans choose far more good than evil. A reasonable objection would be, why wouldn't God weakly actualize the world where humans choose all-good over evil? God is omniscient and omnibenevolent, so he would know this of this world and want to actualize it. In the totality of all worlds, there is a world where Ağca doesn't perform the assassination; in fact, he doesn't do many evil things freely at all. If God weakly actualizes *this* world, then it is really no different than strongly actualizing this world. So instead God weakly actualizes *a* world, and the world history happens as such.

Plantinga then says that it is possible in all these weakly actualized worlds that a particular being goes wrong in respect to some action. It is also possible given all the counterfactuals that God knows, to have a person, which no matter what situation they are placed in, will go wrong at some point. If this one being goes wrong at least once in every weakly actualized world, then it was not in God's power to have this being only perform moral good. If it is the case that this creature goes wrong at least once in every weakly actualized world, then that creature suffers from transworld depravity. Transworld depravity can be defined as:

“An Essence E suffers from transworld depravity if and only if for every world W such that E entails the properties significantly free in W and always does what is right in W, there is a state of affairs T and an action A such that

- (1) T is the largest state of affairs God strongly actualizes in W,
- (2) A is morally significant for E's instantiation in W, and
- (3) If God had strongly actualized T, E's instantiation would have gone wrong with respect to A.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 188.

Summarized, transworld depravity simply states that no matter what weakly actualized world a person is in, that person will go wrong at one point in that world. All Plantinga has to claim is that it is possible that all of God's creations suffer from transworld depravity, because if that is the case, then Plantinga can say that it was not in God's power to create a world containing moral good without moral evil. To summarize Plantinga's point he must show that

(1) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.<sup>39</sup>

Is consistent with:

(2) There is Evil.<sup>40</sup>

So he introduces:

(3) Every essence suffers from transworld depravity.<sup>41</sup>

Which is another way of saying that:

(4) It was not within God's power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil.<sup>42</sup>

Add the proposition:

(5) God actualizes a world containing moral good.<sup>43</sup>

And so this newest, set  $B=\{(1), (2), (4), (5)\}$ , is completely consistent and the Free Will Defense is successful.

At this point the atheologian can regroup again and ask why God didn't just create other creatures. If God had made other creatures, then perhaps it was within God's power to have people who only do moral good and not moral evil. To this Plantinga responds, "Perhaps. But

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<sup>39</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 189.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Page 189.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Page 189.

<sup>42</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 189.

then again, perhaps not.”<sup>44</sup> Plantinga is saying that someone’s essence, in this example, Ağca’s essence, suffers from transworld depravity. Now this says something special of Ağcahood, Ağca’s essence, in that a property of Ağca’s essence is that it has transworld depravity. So if Ağca suffers from transworld depravity, then Ağca’s essence has this property and it was not within God’s power to actualize any world *W* in which Ağca exists and has the property “*is significantly free in W and always does what is right in W.*”<sup>45,46</sup> Plantinga concludes that you cannot just create other people because those people’s essences will have the property of transworld depravity, or that every free creature’s essence suffers from transworld depravity.

The doctrine of transworld depravity implies that there is an implication that this ideal world of creatures performing only moral good and no moral evil, doesn’t actually exist. It is very easy to imagine the life of one person. In this person’s life it is quite possible and almost extremely likely that this person will perform at least one evil action. This proposition is not difficult to imagine for this person or any other person. It seems hard to envision that one person could go through his/her whole life without doing one evil thing. But more important than it being hard to imagine is that it’s also not very probable. In fact, it’s almost completely improbable that any person could go through life without doing one evil thing, never mind every single person in existence within this world and others. Because of this idea, which is hidden within transworld depravity, it was not within God’s power to create a world with no moral evil and only moral good. Here Plantinga rests his argument.

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<sup>44</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 187.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Page, 187.

<sup>46</sup> In *The Nature of Necessity*, Plantinga spends chapters IV-VIII on the different principles of essential properties, the necessity of natures, transworld identity, worldbound individuals, possible but unactual objects (the classical argument and what there isn’t) before getting to this point. I haven’t included these arguments because they would completely derail the current focus, but suffice it to say, Plantinga doesn’t think you can create new people.

One potential problem arises from Plantinga asserting transworld depravity. It's not an issue with transworld depravity in theory, but when being applied to the world, there is some criticism that the theory is only merely possible. Since Plantinga is only trying to show a possible reason that God is not responsible for evil, he only has to show that this case is possible, not practical. Just as easy as it is to imagine someone doing one bad thing, we can imagine someone doing one right thing. And it is conceivable that after one right thing is done, another could be done as well, and so on. This is a conceivable refutation of transworld depravity.<sup>47</sup> It is possible that a person is born, performs one good moral action, and then dies before that person can perform a bad moral action. It would seem from this thought experiment that this person would not suffer from transworld depravity. I'm not sure how Plantinga would respond to this, but it is this line of thought that brings me to the first major line of criticism to the Free Will Defense.

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#### Section IV: The Truth Problem

American philosopher, Hugh LaFollette makes two claims against Plantinga regarding transworld depravity and its implications towards God. LaFollette knows that Plantinga's entire argument turns on the idea of transworld depravity and without it Plantinga cannot reconcile evil in the world with God's traits. So Plantinga thinks that he has shown that Ağca suffers from transworld depravity and he concludes that:

(1) It is possible that: every possible human being suffers from transworld depravity.<sup>48</sup>

This is where LaFollette starts his criticism that transworld depravity is "blatantly false or non-demonstrable." He claims that Plantinga is asserting:

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<sup>47</sup> McNamara, Paul. Some quick thoughts on thesis. 5 May 2013. E-mail.

<sup>48</sup> LaFollette, "Plantinga on the Free Will Defense", 129.

(2) It is logically possible that: For every possible world  $Wx$ , if there are any possible persons in  $Wx$ , then all the inhabitants of  $Wx$  would suffer from transworld depravity.<sup>49</sup>

Since Plantinga is making a claim about the possibility of  $x$  being true in all possible worlds then Plantinga is asserting that it is logically possible that it is necessarily true that  $x$ . Plantinga is trying to say that:

(3) It is logically possible that: it is logically necessary that: all possible humans suffer from transworld depravity.<sup>50</sup>

Now by using the axioms of modal logic system S5<sup>51</sup> we have:

(4) It is necessarily true that: all possible persons suffer from transworld depravity.<sup>52</sup>

The problem here, according to LaFollette is that Plantinga cannot support (3) as he needs to. The conditions to prove that something is possibly necessary are very difficult. LaFollette uses Goldbach's conjecture - every even number is the sum of two primes - as an example to show the stringent conditions of proving such a thing. But the idea is that this conjecture is just simply that, a conjecture. There is no proof to establish its truth, but if it is true, like all mathematical truths, it must be necessarily true, and the knowledge of it being possibly true is sufficient that it is true. But since we do not know if it is true then we cannot know that it is possibly true. The only way to demonstrate that Goldbach's conjecture is possibly true is to actually demonstrate that it is true.

So the only way Plantinga can claim that (3) is true is to know that (4) is already true. But according to LaFollette, Plantinga makes no claim to know (4) is true, and (4) seems to be apparently false, and from examples used by Plantinga the best he could muster is that (1) might

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<sup>49</sup> LaFollette, "Plantinga on the Free Will Defense", 130.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Page 130.

<sup>51</sup> It's the endorsement of this popular logical system that allows Plantinga to conclude that if something is logically possibly necessarily true then it is also necessarily true.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Page 130.

be conceivably true or possible. From these three points LaFollette thinks Plantinga is unlikely to produce any more information to show that (4) is true. LaFollette ends his first criticism here and resumes a new path assuming Plantinga could, in fact, move forward from his previous point. With the definition of transworld depravity in mind, LaFollette thinks that (4) logically entails:

(5) It is necessarily true that: no possible human beings can produce moral good without producing moral evil.<sup>53</sup>

Plantinga thinks that in order to do good someone must be significantly free, therefore:

(6) It is necessarily true that: no significantly free possible human can produce moral good without also producing moral evil.<sup>54</sup>

But this last premise seems to generate a lot of new problems for Plantinga. LaFollette thinks that Plantinga is committed to claiming that God is significantly free, and if this is the case then why is it that God can act freely and only commit moral good, but humans cannot act good without producing moral evil. To avoid this criticism LaFollette thinks Plantinga needs something along the lines of:

(7) It is necessarily true that: no significantly free possible creatures except God can produce moral good without also producing moral evil.<sup>55</sup>

Here LaFollette rests in case because he thinks that this is “clearly indemonstrable (if not preposterous).”<sup>56</sup> LaFollette knows that Plantinga could respond by saying that God is not free, but he doubts that Plantinga would make such a bold statement, as such a claim would hinder other arguments for the Free Will Defender.

This is the first logical problem I have the Free Will Defense. Simply stated: Plantinga cannot make the necessary leap to saying that all free creatures necessarily suffer from

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<sup>53</sup> LaFollette, “Plantinga on the Free Will Defense”, 131.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Page 131.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Page 132.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Page 132.

transworld depravity, and even if Plantinga could show this, it has rather bad implications for God that Plantinga probably isn't willing to sacrifice. With this behind us we can now move onto the second logical problem.

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## Section V: The Counterfactual Problem

Here Plantinga faces a new line of criticism concerning what I think is a major flaw in his Free Will Defense. Philosophers Geirsson and Losonsky refute Plantinga's claim about weakly actualized worlds using what they and Plantinga call 'counterfactuals of freedom', which were mentioned earlier. Geirsson and Losonsky claim that before God did anything, he surveyed the worlds that creatures were free in. Since God couldn't strongly actualize any of these worlds, he can only weakly actualize them. Geirsson and Losonsky as well as Plantinga acknowledge that God has knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom. A counterfactual of freedom has the form: "if *P* were in *C*, then *P* would freely do *A*, where *P* is a possible free agent, *C* is a possible situation, and *A* is a possible free action."<sup>57</sup> Since God has the knowledge of these, then it possible for God to have created a better world than the one we live in now.

If we go back to our Mehmet Ali Ağca example, we can see how this is logical. God does not determine what Ağca does, but he does know what Ağca will do under certain circumstances. God knows that if Ağca gets into Rome undercover via fake passports, meets with his liaison, and acquires his firearm he will commit the assassination. Under these, and many other, circumstances, this event happened. What God could have done to create a better world was to weakly actualize a world in which Ağca never became a member of the Grey Wolves or, a world in which his automatic weapon becomes jammed, or never had Ağca's train

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<sup>57</sup> Geirsson and Losonsky, "Plantinga and The Problem of Evil", 4.



from Madrid arrive on time. This is how, given knowledge of counterfactuals, God could have made a better world.

Since God has knowledge of counterfactuals, he knows what *P* will do even if he does not cause *P* to perform *A* in *C*. So in weakly actualized worlds, God does know what his creations will do even if he is not the cause, so it is possible for God to actualize some better free situations over others. God in this case can eliminate *C* in every case where *P* would go wrong in respect to *A*. “For when God avoids having his subjects caught in situations and events that allow the wrong action, then he is not eliminating free will. He is at most affecting what options are open for the subjects while they still can choose one action over another.”<sup>58</sup> Once we know that God can weakly actualize a world in which his creations only do good, we can assume that God could have done better in creating a world with moral good and no moral evil. I agree with Geirsson and Losonsky, and I firmly believe that the Free Will Defense has been logically defeated. Plantinga responds to Geirsson and Losonsky by saying,

“Re your suggestion: yes, God could certainly do that, and could in general (perhaps) so arrange things that no one ever had to make a moral choice. All choices would be like that between strawberry and raspberry ice cream. What's at issue, though, as I was thinking of it, is a world in which there are free creatures who have significant freedom, i.e., are free to do what is right and free to do what is wrong and who always do what is right. God wouldn't get one like[sic] that by weakly actualizing a world in which no one faced a morally significant choice.”<sup>59</sup>

In a way we have defeated the Free Will Defense here. But this particular victory is empty in a way. We have defeated the Free Will Defense in essence but not in actuality. I think that Plantinga is right that we have reduced the defender to defending morally insignificant actions, but the point of being significantly free is to be able to make moral decisions. We have forced

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<sup>58</sup> Geirsson and Losonsky, “Plantinga and The Problem of Evil”, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. "RE:." Message to Heimer Geirsson. 13 Dec 2007. E-mail.

the Free Will Defender into surrendering the ground we wanted, but we cannot take satisfaction in this hollow victory.

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## Section VI: The Problem of Freedom

My next point comes from Plantinga's final remarks on the Free Will Defense which place emphasis on freedom:

“Of course it is up to God whether to create free creatures at all; but if he aims to produce moral good, then he must create significantly free creatures upon whose co-operation he must depend. Thus is the power of an omnipotent God limited by the freedom he confers upon his creatures.”<sup>60</sup>

I don't believe that God should be limited by the freedom he bestows on his creatures. My point will become clear after I fully explain Plantinga's view, and the implications it has. Plantinga does not believe there is any moral value in a world without choice. Because of this, Plantinga always attributes to humans free will. He values only a world in which the creatures in it are free, because it is that freedom that allows them to make moral decisions. The ability for Adam and Eve to choose to eat or not eat the apple is more valuable than actually not eating the apple. It's not the choices, but the ability to make choices, that Plantinga values. I do not agree with Plantinga on this account in two ways. First, I think a world without the freedom to make choices is still a world that has moral value. I hold a view that moral value is located elsewhere than freedom. Secondly, in a world with natural evil, I think there is always the possibility that the world could be better, in that natural evil could always be reduced or eliminated all together. I think that a world containing free creatures is not necessarily the best world, as Plantinga does. God does not necessarily have to give freedom to humans in order to create a better world,

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<sup>60</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 190.

although for Plantinga, God does have to create that world. Plantinga makes this point clear in his initial Free Will Defense “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.”<sup>61</sup>

I agree with Plantinga that there is moral value in choice and free will, but there is also value outside of choice. To illustrate this point further we need different worlds to refer to and the Bible gives us these distinctions in Genesis 1. So the first world will be  $W_1$ . In  $W_1$  there are free creatures, both human and non-human, as Plantinga endorses. This world also contains moral and natural evil. This is the world that Plantinga thinks we live in now. This is the world after day six of creation. Our second world,  $W_2$ , has no free creatures, and it contains just natural evil. This is the world on day five, before God created Adam and Eve. Our last world,  $W_3$ , is just like  $W_2$ , but contains less natural evil than  $W_2$ . This world too contains creatures but slightly less natural evil. Each world is a different manifestation of what could be the ideal possible world that God should or could have created. Plantinga believes that  $W_1$  is the world with the most value, because it is the only world with freedom. Plantinga also thinks that this is only world where there is moral value. Plantinga thinks that freedom is the only thing that offers moral value, while I disagree, and think that moral value can also be found in pain and suffering.

Plantinga doesn't state this clearly, but I think that Plantinga believes God's aim is to create moral good, and so therefore, God must create a world with freedom, and that is why freedom is so valuable. Plantinga admits that God can create a world without moral evil, but it would also require no freedom, and therefore, no moral good as well. So it is freedom that Plantinga thinks God values the most, so moral good can be obtained. I think that  $W_2$  is more

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<sup>61</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 166.

valuable. This world is valuable, as "... God saw that *it was* good."<sup>62</sup> I recognize the value in free choice, but I believe that freedom is merely extrinsically good, and that there is moral value apart from actions because I judge the amount of suffering and pain in each world as morally valuable.  $W_2$  has no free choice, therefore no moral evil, only natural evil. This world still has moral value. But while I think that  $W_2$  is valuable, I also think that the amount of natural evil can be reduced, and thus, I think  $W_3$  is the most valuable world within the three choices.

I realize this is a very contentious point of view, but I would prefer freedom be removed from the world. There are many philosophers, including Immanuel Kant, who hold freedom and free will as the sole and most important intrinsic value there is. I, however, think in this context that freedom is an extrinsic value, in that it is only good in order to achieve something else, in this case, moral good. In the context of the problem of evil, I think that freedom is over valued compared to the amount of pain and suffering available in the world. With freedom there is pain and suffering, without freedom there is much less pain and suffering, and therefore, in my opinion, I think that freedom should be removed from the equation. Plantinga is in line with Kant's view that freedom is what gives the world moral value, not pain and suffering, so a world without freedom and free will is a world without value. I disagree.

I think that if we use the Genesis story we can see that before humans were introduced in the world there was moral value in the world. It is this value that I think we should be focusing on. I acknowledge that if freedom is added to the world, the overall value of the world can go up with it, but it can also go down, and I think the world around us is a perfect example of what happens when freedom is added to the world. But I don't think that moral value from freedom should be added at all, because the value of the world can still go up without freedom. All that would need to happen, from a practical sense, are any of Hume's recommendations from dealing

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<sup>62</sup> *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, (Columbia: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1987), 1.

with natural evils. From another sense, all that needs to be added to the world is more beauty, or more joy, or more of anything that would cause more happiness or bliss, without introducing freedom.

There are, however, major philosophers who disagree with me here, among them, Leibniz. Leibniz, along with Plantinga, thinks that  $W_1$  is the best world, the only world in which there is value. Leibniz viewed this world as the best, before addressing why freedom should not be removed from it.

Leibniz thought that this world we live in right now was the best of all possible worlds. Leibniz argued against a different manifestation of the problem of evil that is;

- (1) If God is all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing, he would have created the best possible world.
  - (2) This is clearly not the best possible world.
  - (3) Therefore, God is not all-powerful, all-good, or all-knowing.<sup>63</sup>
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Leibniz was faithfully committed that (2) is not true. Leibniz thought it was easy to find some instance of suffering and think that without that instance, the world would have been better. But Leibniz doesn't think that it's possible to judge a world without those certain events, because we are unaware of the connections and ramifications of those events. He thinks that it's possible that by removing certain events, the world could actually end up worse. It's just not possible for humans to know what the results would be if certain events or people had or hadn't existed.

“...our inability to know how changing certain events in the world would affect other events and our inability to know how such changes would affect the overall goodness of the world make it impossible to defend the claim that the manifest evils in the world constitute evidence that this is not the best possible world.”<sup>64</sup>

I must admit that I am sympathetic to this view to a certain extent. If someone were to make a claim that the world would be better off without religion, then I would be in agreement with

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<sup>63</sup> Murray et al. 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

Leibniz in that it would be impossible to know or judge the outcome of such a sweeping change in the world that we live in. However, if someone were to make a similar but smaller statement such that the world would be better off if you didn't stub your toe this morning, then this example seems to fly in the face of Leibniz's thought. I could agree with Leibniz on a macro scale of the world, but when it comes to the everyday things that are evil, I cannot agree with his point that this is the best possible world.

However, Leibniz thinks that like a picture, we cannot understand the picture in its entirety by just looking at just a corner of it.<sup>65</sup> Now I agree with Leibniz here because sometimes there is a context in which an event happens, though this does partially seem to undermine my previous example of stubbing your toe because that event is a small one in the grand scheme of a day. I don't think this is necessarily the case, because, as I stated before, with you stubbing your toe, there is no relevant larger picture to look at. There are in my opinion certain events that happen without any significant overarching effect. You stubbing your toe is a small event that has little to no effect on the rest of your day or life, so this particular event, to me, seems unnecessary in a scheme of the world.

Some people have argued that this isn't the best of all possible worlds for a different reason. The essence of that is that maybe there isn't a best of all possible worlds, in the same way there is no highest number, or there is no recipe to make the best cake. Leibniz was aware that if there were no best of all possible worlds, God couldn't be obligated to create it, so perhaps he made this world arbitrarily. But this Leibniz couldn't accept either, as he is also dedicated to the Principle of Sufficient Reason. According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason there must be a sufficient reason why some state of affairs is actual, rather than another. So because of this principle, this world is actual for a reason, and there cannot be an infinite continuum of better

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<sup>65</sup> Murray et al. 2013

worlds, given that God is omnibenevolent, this is the best possible world. This idea of the best of all possible worlds is also backed up by Leibniz's idea that we don't know how God judges what is good. He thinks it's very presumptuous of humans to think that we could understand God or that our experiences are all that matter. Here Leibniz opens the door for the possibility of taking into consideration the happiness of sentient beings from other planets and also that of supernatural agents.

One such person who disagreed with Leibniz was the French philosopher, Voltaire. Voltaire allegorizes Leibniz's point of view with his character, Pangloss. Pangloss was a complete caricature of Leibniz in that he was a teacher of "metaphysico-theologo-cosmologology. He proved incontestably that there is no effect without a cause, and that this is the best of all possible worlds."<sup>66</sup> Pangloss goes on to mock further the idea of the best possible world;

"...things cannot be other than they are, for since everything was made for a purpose, it follows that everything is made for the best purpose. Observe: our noses were made to carry spectacles, so we have spectacles. Legs were clearly intended for breeches, and we wear them."<sup>67</sup>

Voltaire was clearly criticizing Leibniz with this character. Leibniz, being dedicated to the idea that this must be the best possible world, comes up with different methods to define the best of all possible worlds, and what that might look like. Leibniz uses three criteria to define this world as the best: the maximization of happiness by rational beings, the quantity and variety of essences, and the simplicity of laws. It's unclear to Leibniz scholars which combination of these he actually used to claim that this was the best of all possible worlds, but it was probably a combination of the three.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Voltaire, *Candide*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1985), 20.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Page 9.

<sup>68</sup> Murray et al. 2013

I will mention the maximization of happiness and the variety of essences later in Section VII. The simplicity of laws argument suggests the laws that govern this world are better being simple. Imagine a machine that needs constant interference and tinkering to make perfect or another machine that runs from start to finish with no interaction. Leibniz thinks that if the world has simple laws, God does not need to constantly interfere with the world to make it better. It also absolves God of another problem, the holiness problem. Theists, such as Augustine, hold that God is creator or author of everything in the universe in different ways. He is the creative cause for existence in that he creates everything that exists in the universe, and everything that exists contingently exists because of him. Then God is the conserving cause. Everything that he creates he maintains and continues in existence by virtue of himself. Lastly, God is the concurrent cause of things. So every time a free creature acts to do something, it must be done in harmony with God to get the desired effect<sup>69</sup>.

This intricate interference with the world makes God seem unescapably linked with evil. God, it seems, is causally complicit, and thus morally responsible, for all good as well as all evil in the universe. So the simplicity of laws argument would absolve God of this problem, because if God doesn't need to constantly interact with the world, then God is no longer responsible for what happens within it. To answer this claim and still say how this is not the best of all possible worlds I will go back to Leibniz. He claims before that it is impossible to know how God judges a good world. He cannot say simple laws would make things better, because Leibniz himself doesn't know what would make a better world.

I'm not convinced that this world is the best or at some times, even good. The reason for this is the idea of free will. Plantinga thinks a good universe and world is one where there is

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<sup>69</sup> I think Augustine's account of free will is controversial, and there are some inconsistencies within it, but regardless, Leibniz is responding to this type of framework laid out by Augustine.



freedom. This type of claim rests on a judgment that no matter what results from free will, free will is a supreme value or perhaps the supreme value. Free will is more important than all the suffering here on earth and in the afterlife. God has bestowed upon humans the most important of responsibilities, in hope that we exercise free will for good. This is not a risk that I think God should have been involved in. With no free will the problem of evil would only have a small number of responses left.

The reason why free will should be removed is this: if God giving creatures free will prevents him from limiting or preventing evil, then God should not give creatures free will. This is very important, as I value the amount of evil and good, not the actual choice to make evil. If God could remove free will, he could eliminate an extraordinary amount of evil, and being all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing, it seems this is the path that he must take. Sure this type of choice from God would also eliminate a great deal of good from the world as well, but even with the elimination of free will, there would still be natural evil.

We can introduce Hume's points about natural evil by turning to James Cornman and Keith Lehrer. They argue something different, but their set-up to the problem of evil is universal:

“If you were all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, and you were going to create a universe in which there were sentient beings—beings that are happy and sad; enjoy pleasure; feel pain; express love, anger, pity, hatred—what kind of world would you create? Being all-powerful, you would have the ability to create any world that it is logically possible to create, and being all-knowing you would know how to create any of those logically possible worlds. Which one would you chose? Obviously you would choose the best of all possible worlds because you would be all-good and want to do what is best in everything you do. You would, then, create the best of all the possible worlds, that is, the world containing the least amount of evil possible. And because one the most obvious kinds of evil is suffering, hardship, and pain, you would create in which the world sentient things suffered the least.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 60.

Hume knows that this is not the case for the world we live in today because he thinks that there is still unnecessary evil in this world. I think that it is possible for God to have reduced the amount of suffering in the world by correcting any of Hume's four natural evils, which will be explained soon. It's important to recognize these evils as natural evils because they happen without free will. Plantinga thinks that freedom is necessary for a world with value but these evils, put forth by Hume, show that there is still evil even if free will is taken out of the picture.

Hume when discussing evil is looking at the world through a lens where the characteristics of the world should reflect somewhat its creator. Hume compares the world to a house with an architect. And if in this house there were a flaw, we would blame the architect of the house for the plan they used to build it. I agree with Hume's character, Philo, when you look about the world that you do see these evils within it. The first of these evils is the experience of pain. Creatures often experience pain to live and survive. Pain thrusts animals into a mode of survival, where they can answer desires of hunger and thirst or react to their environments if they're cold or hot. Not only do animals experience this pain by its length and intensity, but often the very experience of pain can erase any degree of joy or pleasure something might experience. The experience of pain is what allows the next three natural evils to have any basis.

Philo's next evil is with the result from general laws that govern the universe. To Philo the natural laws seem random and unpredictable. Health and sickness are not predictable. Animals that rely on favorable conditions rarely receive them, and the unpredictability of nature often works to the disadvantage of many. There are many various, unpredictable, and unknown results that happen randomly throughout nature cause much suffering.

The third evil experienced by creatures is the limited and delicate physical facilities that living things have. Animals often have certain traits but lack other traits that would help them in

different ways. An animal that is fast and swift that runs from predators is often weak and helpless once caught, like a crane or a deer, while in contrast animals that are strong often lack something else that would seem to round out their existence, like a turtle, that has a protective shell, yet is slow and weak. Philo summarizes that it seems animal traits were so sparingly dispersed at creation that most animals barely survive, and never flourish, but with the addition of more faculties many evils could be eliminated.

The last evil mentioned is the delicate balance of the world. Rain is often needed to nourish the world, but it often is too much and produces floods, or it doesn't rain enough and there is famine. The wind is needed to push ships around the world but often the wind gets out of our control producing tidal waves or hurricanes. Philo recognizes the world has a delicate balance that often goes from one extreme to another. These four natural evils can withstand the criticisms that are based on the concept that humans are responsible for the evils that can be brought about by their choices and free will. These evils occur apart from human choices and free will.

The first case is certainly correct in this respect. It is of no fault of humans that we experience pain rather than less pleasure. Humans spend as much time trying to avoid pain as they do looking for pleasure. It is not the result of human interactions that we experience one of these sensations over the other in a biological way. The second natural evil seems to be related to divine intervention or the randomness of events. Certainly these things cannot be the faults of humans. It's not someone's fault if they're born with a mental illness, and it may not be the sole result of human action if someone lives a long life. The third evil is also not choice related. Certainly humans are gifted with reason, but we are limited with what our bodies can do to maximize the use of that reason. Humans are not designed to experience and live through

extreme temperatures and climates. We are not born with the faculties to allow us to flourish in the entire world we live in. The last evil is the delicate balance of the world. Humans have no control over whether it floods or if there is a forest fire. We can stay away from certain things, but we do have a natural dependence on certain geographic locations in order to survive. If a river floods or a tidal wave comes to shore, it's not accurate to blame human choice when we are dependent on these things for survival. So these evils do exist that are not the result of human consequences or their actions, and these are natural evils.

God could correct how we experience pain in relation to pleasure. God could correct the weather or the times that humans are inflicted with sickness. God could give humans better bodies with more faculties other than reason. God could also balance the world so that it doesn't go from one harsh extreme to another. Philo asks,

“Were all living creatures incapable of pain, or were the world administered by particular volitions, evil never would have found access into the universe: And were animals endowed with a large stock of powers and faculties, beyond what strict necessity requires, or were the several springs and principles of the universe so accurately framed as to preserve always the just right temperament and medium, there must have been very little ill in comparison of what we feel at present.”<sup>71</sup>

Even if just one of these sources of evil are not needed, that would be a better world than the one we have today. All one needs to do is simply conjure an example of a world where there is any less evil than there is now, free will or not, and we have shown that evil can be reduced.

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## Section VII: The Natural Evil Problem

In this last section we will explore the complexities of natural evil in the Free Will Defense. So far we have examined how moral evil and free will are related, but natural evil can be caused by things not related to free will. Plantinga does not agree with this. Plantinga accepts

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<sup>71</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 73.

a very classical view of natural evil, in that fallen angels and demons, or nonhuman free agents cause natural evil. The theist defending the Free Will Defense only has to assert that this conclusion is possible, not necessarily true. In this explanation, natural evil is just another kind of moral evil. Therefore, natural evil simply collapses into the Free Will Defense under the disguise of moral evil. Here we can assert our claim from before, that the Free Will Defense can be logically disproven, and therefore natural evil is addressed inadequately in that it still exists without an explanation or justification.

Plantinga addresses natural evil by adding another premise. Remember Set B={ (1), (2), (4), (5)}<sup>72</sup>, from before. Plantinga adds to it

(6) 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 and evil with respect to the actions of the nonhuman persons it contains.<sup>73</sup>

With the addition of (6) Plantinga creates again another type of moral evil, which he believes is consistent with the Free Will Defense. This answer will not be satisfactory for many people; in fact, I think many would find it preposterous. Even if we pretend that Plantinga solved with the Free Will Defense the problem of moral evil and therefore natural evil, we will still revisit this because it seems incorrect to assume that all natural evil is moral evil. Even Plantinga himself says “The mere fact that a belief is unpopular at present (or at some other time) is interesting from a sociological point of view but evidently irrelevant.”<sup>74</sup> Plantinga goes on to conclude that

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<sup>72</sup> From before;

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

(2) There is Evil.

(4) It was not within God’s power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil.

(5) God actualizes a world containing moral good.

<sup>73</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 58.

<sup>74</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 62.

there is not much evidence against angels and demons, and since Plantinga is only showing what could possibly be a reason for the allowance of evil, Plantinga is safe in assuming the cause of natural evil is related to nonhuman free agents. Because we have already refuted the Free Will Defense, and hence the justification of moral evil, and this justification for natural evil is so unpopular and wildly speculative, we will continue to address natural evil supposing Plantinga is wrong in his characterization of natural evil.

The importance of having natural evil exist is the idea that the world could have been better than it is now, that God could and would have created a better world without freedom and with less natural evil. Free will is important to the classical view of existence, but this world could have been better if there were no evil that was not related to free will. Many theologians have tried to show that evil does not exist, to take that burden of responsibility off of God. For our point though, it's important to show that natural evil does exist, because even assuming Plantinga is correct with his Free Will Defense, but not correct with natural evil being another form of moral evil, then there is still evil in the world and the Free Will Defense does not address it, and is therefore inadequate. That is what Hume did; he showed that there is evil regardless of human choice, so Plantinga must be wrong in the respect that all evil is moral evil.

If we examine some arguments we can see that many philosophers and theologians tried to prove that evil didn't exist because they were trying to solve the original problem of evil. Since they couldn't solve it the conventional way, they instead tried to prove that evil didn't exist. Plantinga assumes moral evil exists, but let us examine these arguments regardless, because if they are good, then the theologian can apply them to prove that natural evil does not exist, and therefore, as Plantinga has stated, all evil is moral evil.

It's important to start with the idea that evil may not exist at all, and there are two concepts that do this. One of these concepts attacks the very idea that natural evil. Plantinga condenses natural evil into moral evil. Plantinga does admit that natural evil is actually not the easiest thing to classify. Evils such as the pain caused by climate change, skin cancer, or the spread of HIV/AIDS can be very difficult to classify as natural evil or as moral evil. Voltaire was one who expressed distress over an earthquake in Lisbon. Voltaire mentions the many that died and suffered in an apparent naturally evil event. In response to this poem another French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, criticized Voltaire's categorizing of the earthquake as a natural disaster. Rousseau said:

“The majority of our physical misfortunes are also our work. Without leaving your Lisbon subject, concede, for example, that it was hardly nature that there brought together twenty-thousand houses of six or seven stories. If the residents of this large city had been more evenly dispersed and less densely housed, the losses would have been fewer or perhaps none at all. Everyone would have fled at the first shock. But many obstinately remained...to expose themselves to additional earth tremors because what they would have had to leave behind was worth more than what they could carry away. How many unfortunates perished in this disaster through the desire to fetch their clothing, papers, or money?”<sup>75</sup>

So this argument makes the case that there is no natural evil, and if there is no natural evil, then all evil must be moral evil. The principle of this objection, that there is no natural evil, has some merit, as examples of natural evil can be seen to involve humans and seems to place on humans the responsibility and guilt of the evil. But natural evil shouldn't be disregarded so easily, as we have seen with Hume in the previous section. Hume contends that natural evil is indeed a real thing, and he gives those four examples to illustrate this. We've already seen with these how evils exist without the mixture of free will.

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<sup>75</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "Rousseau's Letter to Voltaire Regarding the Poem on the Lisbon Earthquake, August 18, 1756."

But the second idea is that evil only exists as a privation. Augustine viewed evil not as a thing, but as a lack of something good, or a privation of good. The privation argument is that evil doesn't actually exist, as it is a lack of good that seems evil, just as darkness is the absence of light.

To envision this concept imagine a crown. There is only one piece to the circular crown, the metal piece, not the metal and the hole for the head. The hole in the middle is simply just a privation of metal. No one when making a crown, makes the metal piece and then makes the hole in the middle. The hole is simply a characteristic of the crown.

Leibniz did not agree with this. He used an example of two paintings, one that was larger in scale to the other. He thought it was absurd to say that someone is the creator of what is in the pictures, without also being the creator of what is lacking in the pictures, when all that is lacking in one painting can be found in the other. Leibniz called that type of evil metaphysical evil, not natural evil.<sup>76</sup> Evil in this case has a real nature, and the attempt to categorize it as a lack of good is simply misleading, because someone could simply switch the example around and say that something good is simply the privation of evil.

The other two ways in which Leibniz judges this world as being the best come into focus now, the maximization of happiness and the greatest variety of essences. I mention both of these because they are greater good defenses, which in essence try to claim there is no evil. The maximization of happiness is looking at the big picture of the world and seeing that it is good based on overall happiness. This is a class example of a greater good defense, in that the evil we experience now is outweighed by the overall good that will be experienced. We know this is a contentious thought process because, as I said before, Leibniz is open to the idea of non-human entities and their happiness being factored into this overall happiness.

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<sup>76</sup> Murray et al. 2013.



The variety of essences is the other way in which Leibniz thinks this world is the best. The variety of essences is a good barometer for viewing the world because of its richness and the good seen around us. The greater good is the variety. Leibniz thinks the world could've been something simple such as, everything is a ball bearing, but God recognizes the goodness in diversity. However, I think that places too much emphasis on variety, in the sense that a variety of things, regardless of quality, make this world the best. With respect to diversity, I think Leibniz needs to claim that this diversity is good because after all, there could just be a diversity of pain. Both of these greater good defenses can easily be summarized by Australian philosopher H. J. McCloskey. He states, "If valid, this argument would at best simply show that evil might be justified."<sup>77</sup> I tend to agree with McCloskey in that the greater good defenses try to show there is no evil, but instead only justify the evil that already exists. The arguments prove not that there is no evil, but that there is no unjustified evil. Worse than that is that these types of arguments can lead people down another path. McCloskey thinks that this type of greater good thinking "...implies that we ought to regard the sufferings of others as contributions to the divine melody. And it follows that we ought not to interfere with such sufferings for fear of bringing discord into the cosmic symphony."<sup>78</sup> Since we do not have a God's eye view of the world, it would be impossible for anyone to know when people are actually stopping evil or introducing real discord.

Another argument to try to show that evil is nonexistent is the aesthetic argument. This is the idea that with a God's eye view of the world and all of time, evil doesn't actually exist. It can be thought of as a dark spot in a painting brings out the bright areas and makes them more

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<sup>77</sup> McCloskey, H. J. 188.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. Page 188.

recognizable, or a bitter taste makes a sweet flavor stand out. This view interprets evil as a simple part to the continuation of the world.

It brings no one comfort to know that they suffer an evil, and that it's okay that they suffer because it's all part of some cosmic harmony. Even if it were the case that some evil does make some good stand out better, it only justifies evil's existence. The introduction of the aesthetic argument is a version of the greater good argument, where evil occurs only so that more good happens in the end, so evil is justified. This might be an answer to not eliminating evil in grand scheme of things, but it fails when looking at the world in the short term. The simple reason is that humans do not have a God's eye view of the world. The appeal to cosmic harmony is unconvincing. To know that evil suffered now in the long run pays off is not comforting because someone may never experience the pay off or there may not even be a pay off. Once again this seems like a justification of evil rather than a solution to say it doesn't exist at all. Voltaire is critical of this view with a response to optimists about this all being for the good;

“The heirs of the dead would now come into their fortunes, masons would grow rich in rebuilding the city, beasts would grow fat on corpses buried in the ruins; such is the natural effect of natural causes. So don't worry about your own particular evil; you are contributing to the general good.”<sup>79</sup>

Evil is a real thing, no matter how someone tries to categorize it. Plantinga accounts for moral evil in his Free Will Defense. Even if I am wrong in proving that the Free Will Defense fails, I can still regroup and continue by assuming that Plantinga's characterization of natural evil as moral evil also fails. As I have just shown, natural evil does exist. Evil exists quite apart from moral agents, and I believe that there is too much of this evil. God being, all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, would not have created a world with this much evil in it.

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<sup>79</sup> Voltaire, *Candide*, 9.

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## Section VIII: Conclusion

Plantinga as a religious man, assuming that the Free Will Defense is correct, has only made an excuse for God and the world we live in. He has avoided the real fundamental part of the question, which is why God deserves worship at all with a world like this. Plantinga has taken the easy path to the problem of evil by providing us with his defense, by avoiding the real questions that have large picture implications, such as God's worthiness of being worshiped, why God has allowed this world to be the way it is, and why do bad things happen. Plantinga does deserve credit for answering a classic religious and philosophical question, but I will admit, that I am unhappy with his defense because he has only put forward a reason for things being how they are and not a reason *why* things are how they are. It is the 'why' part of the question where all the weight is.

On a final thought, I'm left remembering a closing scene from the play *Angels in America*. The main character is confronted with a chorus of angels who ask him to be the next prophet, but he refuses due to the state of condition that the world is in now. He says,

“God, he isn't coming back, and even if he did, if he ever did come back, ever, he ever dared to show his face or whatever, in the garden again, if after all this destruction, if after all the terrible days of this terrible century, he returned to see how much suffering his abandonment had created, if all he has to offer is death...You should sue the bastard. That's my only contribution to all this theology. Sue the bastard for walking out. How dare he?”<sup>80</sup>

The Free Will Defense can be logically refuted twice, too much emphasis is placed on freedom and free will, and it doesn't take into account natural evil. The problem of evil is still alive and well, and it seems evil more than ever torments the world. As time goes by evil, it only seems

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<sup>80</sup> Mike, Nichols, dir. "Part 2 Perestroika." Writ. Kushner Tony. *Angels in America*. HBO: 14 Dec 2003. Television.

only increases. This problem needs serious thinkers from all faiths to come together to really see what is worth worshiping.

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