

FREE WILL AND GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVIL

"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*)

Part 1: The Problem of Evil

1 Parameters of the Problem

There are four main parameters to discussions of the problem of evil. The first has to do with the distinction between logical and evidential problems; the second with different kinds of evil; the third with purported solutions to the problem; and the fourth with oft-neglected doctrinal constraints on those solutions. I'll discuss problems to do with the fourth of these as they arise in connection with the other three.

1.1 Logical and Evidential Problems

John Mackie threw down the gauntlet when he argued that the problem of evil is a *logical* one.¹ Elaborating just a little on his argument, we may say that the logical problem arises in so far as the proposition

- (1) There exists a God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good

when supplemented by quasi-logical principles explicating the concepts of omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness, is inconsistent with the proposition

- (2) Evil exists in the world that God created.

The quasi-logical principles involved are

- (P1) An omnipotent being is not limited (by anything other than logic) in what it can do or forbear from doing
- (P2) An omniscient being is not ignorant of any evils that exist, whether they be past, present, or future

¹ J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence", first published in *Mind*, 64 (1955), pp. 200-12, and repeatedly anthologized since then.

(P3) A perfectly good being always eliminates evil so far as it can.²

One way of "solving" the problem would be, of course, to claim that (2) is false. But few would even try to take this way out. To be sure, it isn't easy to give a totally satisfactory account of what the term "evil" means, i.e., to say precisely what is its intension. But there is relatively little difficulty in securing agreement about the kinds of things that paradigmatically fall within its extension: intense suffering occasioned by pestilence, hurricanes, disease, mass-murder, torture, and genocide. All of these occur with a familiarity and frequency that cannot rationally be denied.³

Not only is (2) manifestly true; theists themselves are logically obliged to assert its truth. Each of the three theistic belief-systems, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, holds that the god in whom they believe⁴ doesn't just have the properties asserted by (1). Each also asserts that

(3) God is holy, righteous, and just.

Now holiness, like omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness, is a property that God possesses independently of any of his creatures. However, righteousness and justice ("transitive holiness", as they have been called⁵) are relational properties that God has only by virtue of standing in certain relations to the beings he created. Were we, his creatures, to be without moral blemish, God would not have occasion to exercise his righteousness or justice. Indeed, arguably he would not even *have* these properties, except perhaps dispositionally. The fact that he is claimed both to have, and to exercise, these properties is due to the fact - asserted by all three forms of theism - that all of us have sinned. But sin, of course, is nothing other than the form of evil that God

² Mackie's formulation omits the attribute of omniscience and, consequently, the quasi-logical principle (P2). But it is wholly in accord with the spirit of his argument to include both.

³ One can acknowledge difficulties in trying to give a precise account of the intension of the term; but so long as one recognizes any instances of its extension, no amount of sophisticated reasoning about the "unreality" of evil will enable one to conjure the problem away.

⁴ It might reasonably be questioned whether all three really believe in the same god. To be sure, believers in each may use the definite description "the god of Abraham" to refer to their object of worship. But each ascribes different, and inconsistent, properties to this god. Judaism and Islam deny the essential doctrine of Christianity, viz., that the god of Abraham is identical with Jesus; Christianity and Judaism deny the essential doctrine of Islam, viz., that the god of Abraham is identical with the god who sent Mohamed as his final prophet; and Christianity and Judaism deny the essential doctrine of Judaism, viz., that the god of Abraham is identical with the god whose greatest prophet was neither Jesus nor Mohamed but Moses. By Leibniz's Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals it follows that each believes in a different god and that the expression "the god of Abraham" is misleadingly invoked to describe each.

⁵ C. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*.

most abhors. Hence proposition (3) implies (or as some would prefer to say "presupposes") the *truth* of proposition (2).

The logical predicament of those who believe (3) as well as (1) is therefore particularly acute. Faced with the fact that if the quasi-logical principles (P1), (P2), and (P3) are true then (1) and (2) are inconsistent, it seems that the theist might best respond simply by claiming that (2) - despite appearances - is false. In so doing, the theist would be flying in the face of facts, though not in the face of logic. However, those who also believe in (3), can't take this way out. For one can't consistently believe in (3) and deny (2). Belief in (1) together with our quasi-logical principles implies the falsity of (2); but belief in (3) implies its truth.

The logical problem, in this form, is an acute one for all those who want to subscribe to both (1) and (3). That is to say, it is a problem for theists in general.

A similar, specially acute form of the problem arises for Christians. For most Christians believe it to be true that

(4) God is loving and merciful towards his creatures

Yet (4), like (3), implies (or presupposes) the truth of (2). Mercy ("transitive love", as it has been called) is a relational property. If there were no sinners, there would be no-one to whom to be merciful and forgiving.

Equally problematic, for Christians, is the fact that they believe it to be true that

(5) God sent Jesus Christ to save us from the consequences of our sins.

Yet (5), like both (4) and (3), implies (or presupposes) the truth of (2). Hence any attempt to evade the problem of evil by denying the "reality" of evil must be logically abortive. One could deny the reality of evil, and hence of sin, only if one were prepared to assert that the doctrine of salvation is a fraud.

The implicit contradiction involved in the joint assertion of (1) and (2) can therefore be avoided, if at all, only by rejecting at least one of the principles (P1), (P2), or (P3). But which?

As we'll see in section 1.3, the usual candidate for rejection is (P3). It is argued that a perfectly good being may well have morally sufficient reasons for bringing about, or at least permitting evil, and that - in the event that this is so - he would *not* (contrary to P3) want to eliminate all evils. Plantinga's Free Will Defence capitalizes on this strategy.

Quite apart from the logical problem there is an *evidential* one (sometimes called the *empirical* problem). Suppose it were the case, as Plantinga and others argue, that the logical problem can be solved: that the truth of (2) does not imply the falsity of (1). Even so, the truth of (2) seems to many to probablify the falsity of (1), that is, to render the truth of (1) improbable.

The evidential problem of evil cannot be solved, as the logical problem might be, simply by establishing the logical possibility of God's having "morally sufficient reasons" for allowing evil, i.e., of establishing the bare possibility of (1) being compatible with (2). It is necessary also that one establish the *plausibility* of his having specifiable morally sufficient reasons. Otherwise, the best one could do would be to assert that although God does (indeed must) have such reasons, they are beyond human understanding.

Plantinga thinks that the evidential problem - the problem that calls for an overall explanatory theodicy - can't be solved. I agree, and so will have only a little to say about the evidential problem. But, unlike Plantinga, I don't think the logical problem can be solved either, so will spend most of my efforts, in Part II, trying to show why.

1.2 Kinds of evil

Two kinds of evil are standardly recognized by theodocists: moral and natural evils. Both are familiar in human experience; indeed, both confront most of us almost daily throughout our lives here on earth.

Moral evil is that which results, directly or indirectly, from human agency. It encompasses everything from lies and stealing to genocidal killing and torture. It is what Christians usually call sin.

Natural evil encompasses all the rest, from the death and destruction wrought by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and hurricanes to the disease, pain, and mental anguish suffered by humans and/or other animals.

But natural and moral evils are only part of the problem. Orthodox, biblical Christians also believe in a third kind of evil, *soteriological* evil as it is called.⁶ This is the kind of evil that the New Testament claims will be inflicted "upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." (*II Thessalonians*

⁶ This kind of evil is usually ignored in textbook discussions, though it has recently received a little, long-needed, attention in such journals as *Faith and Philosophy*.

1;8-9).⁷ Belief in its existence is a concomitant of belief in (5), the doctrine of salvation. In its strongest form, it is the belief that

- (6) Those sinners who do not accept God's offer of salvation (through belief in the name of Jesus⁸) will suffer the punishment of eternal torment in the fires of Hell

though some so-called "liberal" Christians can't quite stomach a doctrine so severe.

Clearly, soteriological evil needs to be distinguished from moral and natural evil. It is of a kind that none of us now living has yet experienced, of a kind that belongs not to the here and now but to a place and time (so it is held) which is yet to come. It deserves to be discussed in its own right if only because few people, even biblical Christians, find it easy to understand how a perfectly good god could legislate eternal suffering and "torment" (*Revelation*, 14;11) for those who happen - often for reasons beyond their ken or control - not to have the "right" beliefs.

Belief in the truth of (6) is particularly hard to square with a belief in (1), (3), and (4) given the plausibility of the quasi-logical, attribute-analyzing, ethical principles (ones that should be accepted by consequentialists and non-consequentialists alike)

- (P4) A perfectly good being would not torment or torture anyone for any period whatever, however, brief
- (P5) A righteous and just being would not punish someone eternally for the sins committed during a brief lifetime but would proportion the punishment to the offence
- (P6) Although a righteous and just being might punish someone (though not eternally) for morally culpable actions, it would not punish anyone (for any period) for mere doxastic inability, such

⁷ This passage is quoted, approvingly, by William Lane Craig, "No Other Name': a Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ", *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 6, No. 2, April 1989, p. 173. Talk of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord gives but a pale intimation of the nature of the "destruction". It is more vividly described by such terms as "a furnace of fire [in which] there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (*Matthew* 13:42); "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (*Matthew* 25:41); "tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." (*Revelation* 14:10-11).

⁸ "There is salvation in no one else [than Jesus Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (*Acts* 4:12)

as inability to believe in and consequently accept the saving grace of Jesus⁹

and

(P7) A loving being would do everything possible to bring about the best interests and happiness of those it loves and would show mercy even to those who are its enemies.¹⁰

Nor is it easy to see how the problem of soteriological evil can be "solved" by denying its existence. In the first place, to deny a distinction between the saved and the damned (e.g., by adopting the "universalist" position that God will reconcile all to himself) would be to undercut belief in (5), the doctrine of salvation. After all, the consequences of sin - as understood in (5) - have little to do with those that occur here and now but much with those that are supposed to occur in the hereafter. And, on the face of it, if there is no punishment for unbelievers in the hereafter then there is nothing in the hereafter to be saved from. True, one might hold on to the distinction between the saved and the damned while rejecting the ideas that the punishment of the damned will take the morally abhorrent form of torment, and that their punishment will be infinite in

⁹ "Doxastic inability" covers a host of cases, from those who lived in times when and places where the doctrine of salvation is unknown, to young children and mental defectives who are doxastically incompetent, and - not least - those persons who, because they find aspects of Christian doctrine intellectually or morally repugnant, simply *cannot* believe.

¹⁰ That the first clause of (P5) is analytic of the concept of love is unlikely to be disputed. And the second clause can be disputed only at the cost of supposing that the God who - according to the Scriptures - commanded us to forgive, and even to love, our enemies is not prepared to live by his own injunctions; it is to suppose, in short, that he is a hypocrite.

It should be noted, if only in passing, that Thomas Talbot has recently argued ("The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment", *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 1, January 1990, pp. 25-29 especially) that something like (P7), taken together with the proposition that God loves every created person is flatly incompatible with the doctrine that God will irrevocably reject some persons and subject those persons to everlasting punishment. His "solution" to the problem of soteriological evil is to deny that it has a place in what he calls "Biblical theism." Yet surely those he calls "conservative theists" - the likes of Augustine, Geach, Swinburne, and Stump - are right when they claim that the Bible itself is unabashedly committed to the doctrine. As Geach (quoted page 20) puts it, "if the Gospel account [of Christ's teaching] is even approximately correct, then it is perfectly clear that according to that teaching many men are irretrievably lost." In order to see that Geach is right, one has only to read the parable of the tares in the field in which Christ is reported as saying: "The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (*Matthew* 13:41-42). Or, if that isn't graphic enough, read *Revelation* 14:10-11 which tells us that the damned "shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."

duration. But such modifications to proposition (6) avoid one problem only by generating another. For, in the second place, to deny the doctrine of eternal torment would be to undermine some of the crucial claims of special revelation on which orthodox Christian belief is founded:¹¹ it would be to suppose that Christ - who, more often than any other New Testament figure, threatened unbelievers with Hellfire¹² - was either mistaken or misreported, thus opening up the questions as to whether his teachings as a whole have not been misreported, and as to why one should take any of the Bible seriously.¹³

1.3 "Solutions" to the problems of evil

Following Plantinga, I'll distinguish between two kinds of purported solution. I'll say that defensive theodicies (he calls them simply "defences") are attempts to solve the logical problems by demonstrating that God's existence is compatible with that of evil, and that explanatory theodicies (simply "theodicies", hereafter) are attempts to solve the evidential problems by explaining how God is justified in creating a world containing evil.

Clearly there is a logical order of priority here: theodicies are called for only if at least one defence is successful; otherwise they are a lost cause. And since I'm going to argue that the logical problem admits of no solution, there's not a great deal I want to say about the explanatory theodicies that have been offered. Nevertheless, a few remarks about two of them will help set the scene for what follows, and will help explain why Plantinga's Free Will Defence has come to assume the importance it has in theists' minds.

For present purposes, I'll ignore the so-called "soul-making" theodicy that was pioneered by Bishop Irenaeus (ca. 130 - ca. 202) and recently popularized

¹¹ Arguably, neither so-called "general revelation" nor natural theology provides epistemic grounds for anything more than, at best, some amorphous kind of deism.

¹² A few examples from the Gospel of Matthew: 5, 22; 5, 29-30; 8, 12; 11, 20-24; 12, 32; 13, 41-42; 13, 49-50; 23, 33; 25, 41; 25, 46.

¹³ My maternal grandfather is reported as having reasoned in this way prior to his meeting an attractive young lady through whose agency he became "born again", eventually pursuing a career as a Baptist minister, missionary, and evangelist. "[It is] impossible to conceive a God of love punishing eternally the sins committed in a short human lifetime. . . . Eternal punishment is unthinkable. Christ must have been misreported by the authors of the Gospels. . . . If [in this respect] Christ has been misreported, what reason is there for anyone to deny that he has been altogether misreported, and that the whole of the New Testament is nothing but a collection of fables." Elinor Thornton, *Guy D. Thornton: Athlete, Author, Pastor, Padre*, (Auckland: Scott and Scott, 1937), pp. 28-9. Unlike many others, including two of his grandsons, he was able later (after a providential life-threatening accident) to set these doxastic difficulties aside and simply put faith in the saving grace of God.

by John Hick in his *Evil and the God of Love*.¹⁴ Suppose we agree to think of our souls as being refined in the crucible of suffering in this world or the next. Even so, the sheer *amount* of what Hick calls "dysteleological evil" suggests that God's policy of purification has been a dismal failure. When all is said and done, Hick finds himself saying that "the only appeal left is to mystery." (p. 186) And that's no theodicy at all.

I'll also ignore the traditional Augustinian theodicy of tracing all evil back to what Hick describes as "a common source in the incomprehensible rebellion of finitely perfect beings [the angels who fell] who were enjoying the full happiness of God's presence." I find this theodicy even more repugnant to the intellect than Hick's. It isn't just mysterious. It's inexplicable; or, as Hick himself says, "unintelligible", though I wouldn't go as far as he does in calling it a "fundamental contradiction". (p. 185)

1.31 The Best Possible World Theodicy

I'll comment briefly on the version offered by Nelson Pike.¹⁵ Pike tries to explain why there is suffering in the world that God created by accepting Leibniz's premise

- (7) God, being a perfectly good, omniscient, and omnipotent being, would create the best of all possible worlds (or a world at least as good as any other)¹⁶

and adding to it the claim

- (8) The best of all possible worlds (or a world at least as good as any other) must contain instances of suffering since these are logically indispensable components of such a world

¹⁴ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, (London: MacMillan, 1986), pp. 207-41. Extracts reprinted in Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Problem of Evil*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 38-52. Page references are to the latter.

¹⁵ Nelson Pike, "Hume on Evil", first published in *The Philosophical Review*, 72, (1963), pp. 180-97. Reprinted in Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Problem of Evil*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 38-52. Page references are to the latter. Propositions (7), (8), and (9) all occur on page 46.

¹⁶ The parenthetical description comes from Roderick Chisholm who wisely prefers talk of "a world at least as good as any other possible world" to talk of "the best possible world". See his "The Defeat of Good and Evil", first published in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, 42 (1968-9), pp. 21-38. Reprinted in Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Problem of Evil*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 53-68. This modification avoids some of the problems involved in the idea of there being some maximally good world. But it doesn't affect the difficulties I'm going to raise.

so as to conclude

- (9) A perfectly good, omniscient, and omnipotent God has morally sufficient reason for permitting instances of suffering.

The trouble with this sort of theodicy is that (8) is defective in two ways. Even if it were true that some instances of suffering are logically - not just causally - indispensable to worlds than which there are no better, it is far from clear that all are. Hence, even if (8) were true, it would not explain those instances of suffering, animal and human, which seem not to be indispensable to any good whatever. In any case, (8) is demonstrably false, and must be acknowledged to be so by doctrinally correct Christians. I'll argue both points in turn.

In the first place, one may well acknowledge that there are some evils that are logically indispensable¹⁷ for certain second-order goods in the way that deprivation is for charity, suffering is for sympathy, or wrong-doing is for justice and mercy (as noted in my earlier discussion of (3) and (4)). Of course, if certain forms of evil are logically indispensable to the development of certain sorts of moral virtues, then either God and evil have co-existed eternally (in which case Manicheism, not Theism, will be true) or there must have been a time at which God himself lacked those virtues (in which case one might fairly ask why he thinks it so important for *us* to possess them). But let this pass. For it is far from clear that all evils are of this type, capable of being defeated or "absorbed" (as John Mackie has put it) by such second-order goods. On the contrary, there seems to be a surfeit of evils that cannot readily, if at all, be regarded as indispensable to any goods.

Mackie has argued for this objection in general terms.¹⁸ Others have argued for it as well: William Rowe dealing with the special case of pointless animal suffering (his example being that of a fawn burned in a forest fire and lying in agony until death brings relief)¹⁹, and Christian theodocist Marilyn McCord Adams dealing with the special case of pointless human suffering. Adams, for example, cites cases of what she calls "horrendous evils" and says of them, "where horrendous evils are concerned, not only do we not know God's *actual* reason for permitting them; we cannot even *conceive* of any plausible candidate

¹⁷ Mere causal indispensability, of course, is irrelevant since an omnipotent God isn't constrained by causal laws but only by logical ones.

¹⁸ John Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

¹⁹ William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Varieties of Atheism", first published in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16 (1979), pp. 335-41. Reprinted in Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Problem of Evil*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 126-137.

sort of reason" (p. 215-6).²⁰ As I understand her, Adams is allowing that even if it were true that some evils are necessary components of worlds than which there are no better, it is inconceivable that all should be; and that (8) therefore falls short of providing an adequate explanation for the evils we find in the world God has given us to inhabit.

It may be that she is in fact wanting to assert something stronger, viz., that (8) is false since a world in which there are no unabsorbed evils such as those she calls "horrendous" would be better than one in which the evils that exist are logically indispensable but absorbed. But whether or not this is her intent, I now want to argue for a position that is stronger still, viz., that (8) is false since there are possible worlds, better than the actual one, that contain no instances of suffering whatever.

I maintain that (8) is false because the propositions

(10) There is at least one possible world in which there are no instances either of suffering or of other forms of evil

and

(11) A world in which there are no instances either of suffering or of other forms of evil is better than a world in which there are such instances

are true. Not only that: I'll argue - as a kind of pointed ad hominem - that Christians themselves hold (10) and (11) to be true.

In order to see that (10) is true, it suffices to consider that temporal stage of the actual world which, according to Christian doctrine, existed before God created any creatures whatsoever, i.e., before the fall of Satan and subsequent fall of Adam and Eve introduced evil into the world and before there were any other sentient creatures capable of suffering. Whether the actual world at that stage was populated by anyone other than God-the-Father, God-the-Son, and God-the-Holy-Ghost is a question that can be left to those in the know, presumably Christian theologians and philosophers. And whether there ever was such a stage of the actual world is a question that we can set aside as irrelevant. For even if there wasn't, such a postulated stage of what Christians believe to be the actual world is, in itself, a possible world. Suffice it to say that if that possible

²⁰ Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", first published in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Vol. 63 (1989), pp. 297-310. Reprinted in Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Problem of Evil*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 209-221. Page references are to the latter.

stage of the actual world was as Christians, rather than Manicheans, conceive it, then it was a world in which neither suffering nor any other form of evil existed.

As for (11), to suppose it false would be to suppose that Satan and other fallen creatures such as ourselves have either made things better or at least not made things worse by bringing about the suffering and other forms of evil from the consequences of which God - according to (5), the doctrine of salvation - wishes to save us.

Moreover, the truth of (11) is presupposed by those theodocists who, like Ms Adams, suppose that the evils and suffering that characterize the present temporal stage of the actual world will, in the next stage, be offset by what she calls "the good of beatific face-to-face intimacy with God." Ms Adams, it seems, thinks that the joys of beatific vision await us all, not just the saved but the unregenerate as well. For, discussing the claim that "the sufferings of this present life are as nothing compared to the hell of eternal torment", she comments (heretically?): "Reason would, I submit, dictate a negative verdict for worlds whose omniscient and omnipotent manager permits ante-mortem horrors that remain undefeated within the context of the human participant's life; *a fortiori*, for worlds in which some or most humans suffer eternal torment." Let's overlook the fact that in thereby rejecting (6), she is committed to the view that God-the-Son's own teachings on the matter are either false or unreliably reported. What is significant is that she is envisaging, as a possible future for the actual world, a state of affairs in which there is no longer any suffering or other form of evil, and that she regards this state of affairs as clearly better than the present state of the world. Clearly she is agreeing with me that (11), like (10) is true; and that (8), consequently, is false.

Now it might be thought that my objections to (8) have gone astray since, whereas (8) has to do with a whole possible world (one that Pike thinks the best), the "worlds" that I've offered as counter-examples to (8) are only partial worlds, viz., temporal stages of just one possible world, the actual one.

But there is no non sequitur here. For in that sense of "possible world" which is here at issue, viz., a completely determinate, maximally consistent state of affairs, each of the temporal stages of the actual world is, by itself, a possible world. Indeed, since I want to come back to this point later, it will be useful to distinguish between at least the following six distinct possible worlds, the first four corresponding to past temporal stages of the actual world as postulated by orthodox Christian doctrine, and the remaining two corresponding to alternative future stages of that world. Thus we have:

- (i) a world (Heaven) that is inhabited only by an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, holy, and loving God;²¹
- (ii) a world (Heaven) that is inhabited only by God and the good angels he has created;
- (iii) a world in which there is a Heaven, inhabited by God and the good angels, and a Hell, populated by Satan and the other bad angels;
- (iv) a world in which there is a Heaven and a Hell, inhabited respectively as in (iii), plus a physical universe inhabited by sinful human beings and other sentient creatures all of whom are capable of suffering;
- (v) a world there is a Heaven (and perhaps a reconstituted physical universe) inhabited by God and human souls all of whom are experiencing the kind of beatific vision that Adams envisages;
- (vi) a world in which there is a Heaven (and perhaps a reconstituted physical universe) inhabited as in (v), plus a Hell inhabited by human souls undergoing eternal torment.

Of these six worlds, it makes sense to suppose: that God might have created (or actualized)²² any of them other than the first (unless, of course, one can make sense of the idea that God created, or actualized, himself); that of the worlds he might have created, (ii) and (v) are ones in which there is no suffering or other form of evil (thereby verifying (10)); and that both worlds (ii) and (v) are clearly better than worlds (iii), (iv), or (vi), (thereby verifying (11)).

²¹ This corresponds to that temporal stage of the actual world which Christians postulate as having existed prior (in some sense) to God's creation of the angels. I say "prior (in some sense)" so as not to beg the question against those who suppose that God created time itself and so, "prior" to so doing, was not himself "in" time. I have little sympathy with the view that the concept of a timeless personal God is either coherent or doctrinally sound. Although, with Shoemaker, I think it logically possible that time should pass in the absence of any events occurring, I can make no sense of the idea that events should occur except "in" time. A timeless God, in my view, would be a catatonic God, one capable of doing nothing like interacting with us his creatures, or even creating time itself (since creation is a causal, and hence a temporal, notion). But those who can make sense of the notion of God's timeless eternity are welcome to any other notion of priority that takes their fancy, perhaps just to the notion of his existing (in William Craig's preferred locution) "sans" creation of anything else.

²² Plantinga prefers to talk of worlds being "actualized" rather than "created". But, so far as I can see, this is a terminological difference of no consequence to the present discussion.

There are, of course, countless other worlds that God might have created, such as the composite world in which (ii) through (iv) follow one another temporally and are followed, in turn, by either (v) or (vi). The composite world comprising (i) through (iv) plus (vi), of course, is that which the orthodox hold to be identical with the actual world. But whether or not they are correct, such a composite world is clearly not as good a world as is either (ii) or (iv). So in this case, too, (8) is false.

1.32 The Free Will Theodicy

The central thesis of Free Will theodicy is that at least some, perhaps all, evil states of affairs are ones for which God is not responsible since they result from the acts of free creatures.

I happen to think (along with both Mackie and Plantinga) that a Free Will theodicy is the only one that "has any chance of succeeding." So let's look at one that might be pieced together from elements of Plantinga's Defence. True, Plantinga himself seems to think that no theodicy, even a Free Will one, "can give a very good answer to the question: why does God permit the evil he does permit?"²³ This is why he finds it prudent to retreat to mere Defence. But before we examine his Defence in Part 2, I'd like to examine the kinds of reasons that one might have for agreeing with his general downplaying of Free Will Theodicy (though they may well not be Plantinga's own reasons).

In effect a Free Will theodicy tries to absolve God of responsibility for evil by insisting that evil is due entirely to bad choices made by creatures having free will. As Mackie (in his exposition of Plantinga) puts it: "Since these (bad) choices are freely made by men or by fallen (falling) angels, neither they nor their effects can be ascribed to God. All that can or need be ascribed to him is the creation of beings with the freedom to make morally significant choices." (p. 155).

Invoking the bad choices of fallen angels gives Plantinga's Free Will Theodicy a degree of explanatory competence that it would otherwise lack. It allows him to hypothesize that natural evils are ascribable to the corrupt wills and malevolence of Satan and his cohorts, in much the same way as moral evils are to ours.

²³ Alvin Plantinga "Is Theism Really a Miracle?", *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 3, No. 2, April 1986, p. 123. This paper is in effect a critical review of Mackie's book *The Miracle of Theism*. Plantinga is hard-nosed when it comes to accusing Mackie of failing to distinguish clearly between a Free Will Theodicy and a Free Will Defence. But I think it fair to say that Plantinga himself doesn't always make it clear as to which of his philosophical moves count as which. In this section, therefore, I concentrate on those of his arguments which go beyond what is strictly called for in order to mount his minimalist "defence".

How about soteriological evils? Plantinga, wisely, doesn't discuss them. True, some have suggested that the wills of the damned are so corrupt that they remain in Hell of their own free choice. But this sort of incorrigibly perverse rebelliousness on the part of finitely sinful beings who are suffering the full wrath of God's vengeance is no more comprehensible than Augustine's story (alluded to above) of the initial rebellion of finitely perfect beings who are enjoying the full happiness of God's presence. It is, of course, logically possible that sinners should insist on self-immolation. But playing with bare logical possibilities in this sort of way, though it may suffice for purposes of defence, doesn't suffice for theodicy. Nor will it do to argue, with theodicist Eleonore Stump, that even if sinners who have experienced a taste of Hell were, of their own free wills, to opt for God's offer of salvation, God would be justified in leaving such Johnny-Come-Latelys in perdition since their wills would be improperly motivated.²⁴ This, too, is so psychologically unreal as to deserve no part in a plausible explanation.

Plantinga likes to help himself to orthodox doctrines when it suits his purposes. The doctrine of Fallen Angels is a case in point. So, too, is the doctrine of the Fall of Adam and Eve and the associated doctrine of Original Sin.

Plantinga invokes the latter in the guise of his talk of transworld depravity. Mackie had asked why God couldn't have created significantly free beings who always freely choose the good. He acknowledges that it would be incoherent to suppose that God might "make" persons or other created beings freely choose the good, but claims that it would not be incoherent to suppose that God might have created beings "such that" (p. 165), i.e., of such natures or essences that (p. 172-4), they always freely choose the good. Plantinga answers by once more playing with possibilities. It is just possible, he retorts (p. 188), that the proposition

(12) Every creaturely essence suffers from transworld depravity

is true, where a creature is said to suffer from transworld depravity if "every world that God could have weakly actualized is such that if [that creature] is significantly free in it, then he performs at least one wrong action in it."²⁵ Continuing, he claims (pp. 188-9):

But suppose this is true. God can create a world containing moral good only by creating significantly free persons. And since every person is the instantiation of an essence, he can create significantly free persons only by instantiating some creaturely essences. But if every such essence

²⁴ Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil", *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 4, October 1985, p.403.

²⁵ "Is Theism Really a Miracle?", p.125. A state of affairs is said to be weakly actualized by God if God uses his knowledge of certain counterfactuals of freedom to bring about, though not to causally determine, the occurrence of that state of affairs.

suffers from transworld depravity, then no matter which essences God instantiated, the resulting persons, if free with respect to morally significant actions, would always perform at least some wrong actions.

So, he concludes

(13) It is possible that God could not have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

Plantinga's talk of transworld depravity smacks more than a little of Augustine's harsh talk of "the whole human race [being] condemned in its apostate head"²⁶ and leaves one wondering just how free our wills are if they are manifestations of depraved essences which we unwittingly inherit (as Stump thinks we do²⁷) from Adam and Eve.

But set this aside for the moment. Other questions come in a cascade.

Suppose we grant Plantinga's claim that it is "possible" that all creaturely essences are depraved. Isn't it equally "possible" that there are some creaturely essences which are not? To suppose that it is *not* equally possible that some (or even all) creaturely essences are undepraved, is to suppose that it is *necessary* that all creaturely essences are depraved. But that is surely false. And if we therefore conclude that it is possible for there to be persons with undepraved, let us say "saintly" essences, then why didn't God instantiate those person's essences instead of ours? True, if he'd chosen others, then *we* wouldn't exist. But it will be admitted on all sides that there's nothing so great about us. Mackie's question as to why he didn't create significantly free persons with saintly essences remains unanswered.

This bears on a related point regarding what Plantinga calls "Leibniz's Lapse". Leibniz, you see, had supposed it to be in God's power to create any possible world that he pleases (or any such world that includes his own existence). And atheologians (a common pleasantry for atheists), Plantinga argues, have often proceeded as if Leibniz was right and hence have concluded that God could have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil, since such a world is indeed possible. But, according to Plantinga, Leibniz was wrong. The class of possible worlds is subdivided into those that are *feasible* for God to create and those that not feasible for him to create,²⁸ where the

²⁶ Quoted by Thomas Talbot, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment", p. 22.

²⁷ Her solution to the problem of evil draws upon her belief that "(a) at some time in the past as a result of their own choices human beings altered their nature for the worse, (b) the alteration involved what we perceive and describe as a change in the nature of human free will, and (c) the changed nature of the will was inheritable." (pp. 402-3)

²⁸ The "feasible/nonfeasible" locution is one that I found in Craig (p. 178). I don't know whether Plantinga himself ever employs it.

distinction between feasibility and its absence turns on God's knowledge of certain counterfactuals of freedom (certain counterfactuals about "what certain possible creatures would freely do under conditions that will never be actualized").²⁹ God is constrained by his knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom regarding us. He knows that if he were to create *us*, then by virtue of our depravity we'd bring about moral evil. So it isn't feasible for him to create *us* in a world that contains only moral good.

But this doesn't make the problem go away. For, by the same token, God is constrained by his knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom regarding possible creatures whose essences are saintly. He knows that if he creates *them*, then by virtue of their saintly wills they'll bring about only what is morally good. It is therefore wholly feasible for him to create *them* in a world that contains only what is morally good. So the question still remains: Why didn't God create a world containing only creatures with transworld saintliness rather than transworld depravity?

In any case, Plantinga's doctrine of transworld depravity draws on one article of orthodoxy only to run into constraints from others. Recall, for a moment, the possible worlds corresponding to the different temporal stages through which Christians believe that the actual world will pass. World (v) is that in which there is a Heaven (and perhaps a reconstituted physical universe) inhabited by God and human souls all of whom are experiencing the ineffable joys of the beatific vision. If such a world is possible, as it surely is (and as it surely must be if, as Ms Adams thinks, it is going to be actual), then we will want to ask: Are its inhabitants significantly free? If they are, and significant freedom entails the possibility (or is it the actuality) of moral evil, then won't Heaven must be as fertile a ground for sin and sinners as is our present vale of tears? Why then should believers look forward to it? In view of the consequences of our present significant freedom, shouldn't we conclude that significant freedom will then, as now, prove to be a divine curse rather than a divine blessing? If, on the other hand, the inhabitants of world (v) lack significant freedom, then we must ask: Why does God think it imperative that we have it now if we don't need it later? Or are we to conclude that a person both have a a saintly and at the same time be significantly free? Surely not. World (v) might, if Hick's soul-making theodicy is right, be thought of as a world inhabited solely by such significantly free saints. And if so, this would help explain why world (v), according to Ms Adams, is one that contains moral goodness in abundance but no moral evil.

²⁹ I borrow this description from Marilyn McCord and Robert Merrihew Adams's introduction to *The Problem of Evil*, p. 14.

But, whatever the explanation, the case of world (v) shows that proposition (13) - Plantinga's claim, "it is possible that God could not have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil" - is just plain false.

This is easily demonstrated. Note that Plantinga does not say that God could not have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil; he says only that it is *possible* that God could not have created such a world. His (13), however, is equivalent to

(14) It is possible that it is not possible that God creates a world containing moral good but no moral evil

But we have already seen that the possibility of world (v) establishes the truth of

(15) It *is* possible that God creates a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

And if (15) is true, then by the modal theorem that what is possible is necessarily possible, it follows that

(16) It is necessarily true that it is possible that God creates a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

But then, by the theorem of the modal logic known as S5 (to which Plantinga is committed) that what is necessarily possible is not possibly not possible, it follows that (16) is inconsistent with - indeed the contradictory of - (13). Hence, since world (v) is possible, Plantinga's claim, (13), is false.

Besides, the case of world (v) generates another pertinent question: Why, in God's creative sequencing of world stages, didn't he proceed straight from the stage corresponding to world (i) (or perhaps that corresponding to world (ii)) to the stage corresponding to world (v) without the intermediate steps in which moral and other evils obtrude? Remember: he is constrained only by laws of logic, not by any causal laws that might link these world-stages.

Similar problems arise when we consider world (i). To be sure, we'll probably want to abandon talk of God "creating" it since it is a world in which he alone exists. Nevertheless, it is a possible world. Yet is it not also one in which God himself is both significantly free and morally good? Does the fact that, according to orthodoxy, God's nature precludes him from doing evil³⁰, mean that he lacks significant freedom? If not, why didn't God both preserve our (or

³⁰ This account of God's nature is reported by Peter Horban in his "Euthyphro Revisited" (in *Being and Somethingness: Essays in Honour of John Tietz*, Simon Fraser University, 1990. p. 115) and reiterated in his "Ray Bradley, Abraham, and the Midianites" (in *Here and Now: Essays in Honour of Raymond Dynevor Bradley*, Simon Fraser University, 1991, pp. 107ff).

someone's) significant freedom and at the same time give us (or someone) natures which were saintly rather than depraved?

In order to constitute a theodicy - an attempt to "justify the ways of God to man" (as Plantinga puts it)³¹ - Plantinga's story about evil being a consequence of our (and the fallen angels') free exercise of depraved wills, would have to be expanded to include plausible answers to all the above questions. More than that: it would also have to provide compelling reasons for supposing that (12) is in fact true, not just possible. Little wonder, then, that he is doubtful of the adequacy of all theodicies - his own intimations of a Free Will one included - and retreats to the minimalist position of offering a mere defence.

Part 2: God's Responsibility and a Free Will Defence

2 Plantinga's Free Will Defence

Plantinga claims that for purposes of defence - defence, that is, against the charge that (1) and (2) are logically inconsistent - it is not necessary that (12) be true, only that it be true.

In order to construct his defence, Plantinga relies on a simple theorem of modal logic:

$$(17) \quad [\diamond (P \ \& \ R) \ \& \ ((P \ \& \ R) \Rightarrow Q)] \Rightarrow \diamond (P \ \& \ Q)$$

Let P = (1) (the proposition that there exists a God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good), and Q = (2) (the proposition that evil exists in the world God has created). Then, the argument goes, (1) and (2) can be shown to be consistent by the simple expedient of finding some third proposition (or conjunction of propositions) R which is compatible with P and whose conjunction with P entails Q. According to Plantinga (*The Nature of Necessity*, p.189), the role of R in the present case is played by the conjunction of (12) with the proposition

$$(18) \quad \text{God actualizes a world containing moral good.}$$

The desired defence seems to fall into place in short order. We need only agree with his claim that the following two requirements are satisfied:

$$(a) \quad \text{that the conjunction of (1) with R entails (2);}$$

and

$$(b) \quad \text{that (1) is consistent with R.}$$

³¹ "Is Theism Really a Miracle?", p. 122.

It will then follow - contrary to Mackie and others who accuse theism of being self-inconsistent - that (1) is compatible with (2).³²

This part of Plantinga's strategy is impeccable. But the details of its execution call for closer scrutiny.

Claim (a), I suggest, is the place to start. For the conjunction of (1), (12), and (18) surely don't, all by themselves, entail (2). After all, the concept of evil features in the conclusion but not in the premises. And a valid argument, we all know, can't have more in its conclusion than there is in its premises. So how does evil get into the act, as it were? Obviously, Plantinga must here be taking for granted certain other premises which he supposes to be analytic implications of (12) and (18), or at least to be implicit in his discussion of these propositions. But what might these additional premises be?

There is, of course, a single premise which promises to do the trick, viz.,

(19) It is not possible that God creates a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

This proposition, taken together with (18) (that God actualizes a world containing moral good), certainly entails (2) (that evil exists in the world that God creates). We don't even need (1), let alone (12). So, of course, requirement (a) is satisfied. Moreover, we remind ourselves, (19) doesn't even have to be true. If it is going to function as one of the suppressed conjuncts in R, it need only be possibly true.

But the trouble is that (19) *isn't* possibly true. On the contrary, given the truth of (15) and (16) - already established - (19) is necessarily false. The inference is trivial. For (16), whose truth we have already established, is equivalent to

(20) It is necessarily false that it is not possible that God creates a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

It is equivalent, in short, to

(21) It is necessarily false that (19).

But this means that Plantinga's defence collapses. In the very process of satisfying requirement (a) (by finding a conjunctive proposition R which, when conjoined with (1), entails (2)), he violates requirement (b) (that there should be no inconsistency between R and (1)). After all, since (19) is one of the conjuncts

³² The argument is spelled out on page 189 of *The Nature of Necessity*. I have taken liberty only to change the numbering.

in R, and (19) is necessarily false, it follows that R is necessarily false, and hence is inconsistent with every proposition, including (1).

Might there not be another premise or set of premises that would play the required role of R by supplementing Plantinga's own (12) and (18) so as to produce a conjunctive proposition such that requirements (a) and (b) are jointly satisfied?

How about the following? Suppose that, in order to give the argument from (1), (12), and (18) to (2) some semblance of cogency, we invoke as additional premises

(22) In actualizing a world containing moral good, God actualizes a world containing significantly free creatures

(23) In actualizing a world containing significantly free creatures, God actualizes essences that suffer from transworld depravity

and

(24) In actualizing essences that suffer from transworld depravity, God creates persons (and perhaps fall-prone angels) who of their free will bring about evil.

Let's concede, once more, that in order for Plantinga's strategy to be executed successfully, it needn't be the case that all these additional premises are true. So it is beside the point that I've already given pretty compelling reasons (stemming from the possibility of world (ii)) for saying that at least one of them, (23), is false, or highly questionable. It will suffice, for Plantinga, that these premises be *possibly* true and such that (a) when conjoined with (1), (12) and (18), they entail (2), and (b) when conjoined with (12) and (18), they are severally and jointly consistent with (1).

The first of these requirements seems to me to be clearly satisfied. For not only are propositions (22) through (24) severally and jointly possibly true: they all by themselves, as it were (that is without any need of (1) or (12)), entail (2), the existence of evil in the world that God creates.

But how about the second requirement? Once more, there's the rub. For the *prima facie* inconsistency that Plantinga is trying to conjure away between (1) and (2) seems to hold even more obviously between (1) and (24). I fail to see, that is, that God's being perfectly good is consistent with his creating persons (and perhaps fall-prone angels) who of their own free will bring about evil. According to my lights, if (24) were true then, by virtue of his omniscience, God is

- as lawyers and judges say - "an accessory before, during, and after the fact".³³ He is, at the very least, partly responsible for the outcome of his creative act, viz., the existence of evil; and if even partly responsible for evil, then he is not (contrary to (1)) perfectly good.

Strangely, Plantinga seems preoccupied with showing that the propositions which comprise R in modal schema (17) are compatible with proposition (1)'s attribution of *omnipotence* to God. He tells us that (12) "is consistent with God's omnipotence", and then concludes: "But then it is clearly consistent with (1)." But his conclusion, even if true, is a non sequitur. In order to show that the propositions comprising R (where R, remember, doesn't just consist of (12) but of other propositions as well) is consistent with (1) he must show that the propositions conjoined in R are severally and jointly consistent not only with God's omnipotence but also with his omniscience and perfect goodness. Proposition (1), he seems to have forgotten, is itself a conjunction. It won't do merely to assert (or even to demonstrate) that all the propositions conjoined in R are severally and jointly consistent with just one of the conjuncts in (1). It needs to be shown that they are also consistent with all the conjuncts in (1) taken together. And this is something Plantinga noticeably fails to do.

His preoccupation with omnipotence, to the exclusion of omniscience and perfect goodness, becomes evident again in the way he summarizes his Free Will Defence. He writes:

The essential point . . . is that the creation of a world containing moral good is a co-operative venture; it requires the uncoerced concurrence of significantly free creatures. But then the actualization of a world W containing moral good is not up to God alone; it also depends upon what the significantly free creatures of W would do if God created them and placed them in the situations W contains. 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. (p. 230) [Emphasis added]

Plantinga concentrates on showing that Leibniz lapsed when he claimed that God's omnipotence enables him to create any possible world, not just feasible ones. But he thereby overlooks the fact that God's knowing creation of one of those feasible worlds in which free creatures produce evil as well as good,

³³ Having already written this passage, I was dismayed - yet at the same time delighted - to find that David Lewis had already used the words in quotes to announce his own conclusion in the very first paragraph of his unpublished paper "Evil For Freedom's Sake". Lewis's arguments for that conclusion are very different from my own. I am grateful to Steven _____ for bringing Lewis's admirable paper to my attention.

though it doesn't compromise his omnipotence, does compromise his perfect goodness and/or his omniscience by making him a witting party to this unsuccessful co-operative venture.

Note that, in saying that "the actualization of a world *W* containing moral good is not up to God alone", Plantinga is effectively admitting that it is up to God at least in part. And this, by any ordinary standards for the attribution of responsibility for the so-called "co-operative venture", makes God responsible at least in part.

Note, too, Plantinga's admission that "it is up to God whether to create free creatures at all". Strangely, he seems not to realize how damaging this admission is. Not only is it "up to God"; it is *entirely* up to God. And God, like us, must bear responsibility both for his actions (assuming, as presumably we must, that he too is free), and for the consequences of those actions (assuming, as by hypothesis we must, that he knows the consequences). The fact that we (and perhaps the fallen angels) freely choose to bring about evil, makes us partly responsible for evil. But this doesn't mean that God isn't also at least partly responsible for that evil. It doesn't absolve God of all responsibility for evil. Yet if God can justly be held responsible for evil, even in part, then he is not perfectly good. Plantinga's Ploy simply doesn't work.