

A Brief Introduction to the Problem of Evil and the Free Will Defense

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Brent S. Lauder

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Steve Ashby

Dr. Steve Ashby

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

Date

December 1999

Expected date of graduation

December 1999

SpColl
Thesis
LD
2489
.Z4
1999
.L38

Lauder 2

Abstract

Every worldview has an explanation for the presence of evil. Some worldviews can explain evil easier than others. Many eastern perspectives explain the existence of evil in terms of a cause and effect system known as Karma. Every instance of evil that an individual may encounter during his or her lifetime is a direct result of some action or nonaction that was or was not performed in the past. On the other hand, the monotheistic worldview has a much more difficult time than the eastern worldview. The monotheistic position must defend the belief that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God exists, even in light of the obvious evils that have found a home here on earth. The following is a brief exploration of the problem of evil within monotheism as presented in its two forms: the logical problem of evil and the evidential problem of evil. I will examine the strengths and weaknesses of various monotheistic responses to the problem.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks are due to Dr. Stephen Ashby, my thesis advisor, for his role in this rigorous process. He challenged me to undertake this topic in the first place, offered valuable and sometimes devastating comments on the drafts of this thesis, and provided superior editorial advice in the final stages. Thank you Dr. Ashby for your willingness to give selflessly for the sake of the truth.

"Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know" (Isaiah 47:11, KJV).

Evil. Whether it is in the form of an unwarranted parking ticket, or the news of a premature death of a close friend, it affects us all. The question becomes, how do we deal with it? Is there a reason why the innocent suffer? How can Theism propose that an all-loving and all-powerful God exists when His own people are pointlessly destroyed? This, in short, is the problem of evil: How can there be an actively involved, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God when His creation is plagued with evil? Critics argue that this world is not what we might expect from an all-powerful, all-loving God. Surely, if he did exist, He could have done a better job. The problem of evil has been so persuasive that the German Theologian Hans Kung has called it the "rock of atheism." Through theistic suppositions and the free will defense, the following is an attempt to show that the existence of an omnipotent and wholly good God can both logically and plausibly coexist with the presence of evil.

Yankel Wiernik, a carpenter and survivor of the Holocaust recalls:

Between 450 and 500 persons were crowded into a chamber measuring 125 square feet in Treblinka. Parents carried their children in the vain hope of saving them from death. On the way to their doom they were pushed and beaten with rifle butts and gas pipes. Dogs were set on them, barking, biting and tearing them. It lasted a short while. Then the doors were shut tightly with a bang. Twenty-five minutes later everybody was dead and they stood lifeless; there being no free space, they just leaned against each other. They no longer shouted because the thread of their lives had been broken. They no longer had any needs or desires. Mothers held their children tightly in their arms. There were no more friends, no more enemies. There was no jealousy. All were equal. There was no longer any beauty or ugliness, for all looked yellow from the gas. There were no longer any rich or poor. All were equal. And why all this? That is the question I keep asking myself. My life is hard, very hard. I must live to tell the world about this (Wiesel et al. *Dimensions* 14-15).

Another chilling affair giving credence to the very real presence of evil that mankind both creates, and is exposed to, is recalled by another Holocaust victim upon his arrival at a concentration camp:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned to wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never (Wiesel *Night* 43-44).

The existence of evil has long been used by many to discredit the claims of the Theist. The most impressive of the claims against theism is known as the problem of evil. Many suggest that the existence of evil makes the belief in God unreasonable or rationally unacceptable. The theologian Eugene Borowitz explicates:

Any God who could permit the Holocaust, who could remain silent during it, who could "hide His face" while it dragged on, was not worth believing in. There might well be a limit to how much we could understand about Him, but Auschwitz demanded an unreasonable suspension of understanding. In the face of such great evil, God, the good and the powerful, was too inexplicable, so men said "God is dead" (Borowitz 99).

DEFINING EVIL

When discussion of the problem of evil arises, it is wise to first start with a precise definition of what evil is. The need for a precise definition of evil may initially sound witless, but as we proceed, we will find great utility in having a similar conception of evil as our starting point. This, however, can be an arduous task. When defining evil, it is easy to bring one's own presuppositions or first-principles to the table, thus, hindering the objective goal of defining evil. Most individuals, when questioned about evil, would more or less agree to a set of circumstances where the term evil *applies*. However, these same individuals might disagree as to what the term evil *implies*. For example, most people agree that the actions of the "final solution" instituted by Nazi Germany were evil; however, whether those same actions constitute as "sin," or "rebellion against God" is highly debatable. Considering this, I will proceed with a nonsuggestive, commonsense notion of evil, free of religious influence. For our purposes, evil will be recognized as extreme pain and suffering, physical deformities, psychological abnormalities, the prosperity of bad men, the demise of good men, the disruption of social relations, unfulfilled potential, a host of character defects, and natural catastrophes.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AS AN INTERNAL PROBLEM

The problem of evil is an internal problem for the Theist. Many theistic defenses have failed miserably because the defender utilized only the information provided to them by the attackers. This method of defense is not only limited, but it is also absurd. Because the problem of evil is a theistic problem, the Theist should, and certainly has the right to, explore the full scope of theistic suppositions in solving or defending the

problem. It is from this internal perspective that I will concentrate my efforts in exploring this internal quandary.

THE PROBLEM

So, what then shall we say the problem of evil is? H.J. McCloskey stated the riddle in the following way, "There is evil in the world; yet the world is said to be the creation of a good and omnipotent God. How is this possible? Surely a good and omnipotent God would have made a world free of evil of any kind" (McCloskey 187). For the sake of both clarity and utility, I will condense the problem of evil into two propositions:

- (1) God is omnipotent and wholly good
- (2) Evil exists.

The problem presented is clear. If God is omnipotent, meaning all-powerful, He should be able to eliminate all forms of evil. Also, if God is omnibenevolent, meaning all-good and all-loving, He would want to eliminate all forms of evil. Yet, evil does exist. The conclusion then is easy. Since evil exists, either God is not omnipotent and omnibenevolent, or He doesn't exist at all. This, then, is what we will consider when discussing the suggested problem of evil.

Critical attacks on theism generally follow one or two different veins of attack: the logical problem of evil, and/or the evidential problem of evil. I will discuss both at length starting first with the logical problem of evil.

THE LOGICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

John Mackie (1917-1981), a well known critic of theism, states in his *Evil and Omnipotence* the logical problem of evil, "God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; yet, evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false" (Mackie 92). What Mackie is

asserting in this quotation can be stated in a number of different ways. This is one possibility: If God is omnipotent, and if God is wholly good, evil should not exist. A second possibility: If evil exists, and if God is omnipotent, God cannot be wholly good. A third alternative to Mackie's claim: If God is wholly good, and if evil exists, God cannot be omnipotent. Mackie's charge against theism correctly asserts the three beliefs that God is omnipotent, God is wholly good, and that evil exists. These are essential foundations for most theistic positions. Mackie's next move is to demand that one of these premises be dropped for the sake of logical consistency. "But at the same time," Mackie asserts, "all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three" (Mackie 92-93). The demand, then, of the atheist or atheologian, is that the Theist must either drop the premise that God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, or the premise that evil exists. Although this problem is known by various names such as the deductive problem or the *a priori* problem, the common element is the charge that theism involves an inconsistent set of beliefs concerning God and evil, and that the Theist is unwarranted in believing them. The role then of the theist defender is to show that the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God is compatible with the existence of evil.

THE EASY WAY OUT

Some Theists, known by some as quasi theists or ethical monists, have answered the logical problem of evil by denying the premise that evil exists. Evil then is presented as an illusion or only perceived as such by man. Two notable examples are the Christian Scientists and some forms of Judaism. Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, stated, "Nothing is real and eternal, -nothing is Spirit, -but God and His idea. Evil has no reality. It is neither person, place, nor thing, but is simply belief, an illusion of material sense" (Eddy 71).

Some followers within Judaism adhere to this same path of thinking when considering the existence of evil. Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, an orthodox Jewish Rabbi, concedes that the question of evil has been debated among the rabbis for centuries. The problem that the rabbis faced was that if evil does exist, how could it have been created by God since all that flows from God is pure Goodness. Also, if evil does exist and God did not create it, that assumes the autonomous, ontological status of the devil who is a coequal being with God, something that Judaism rejects. How then have some adherents within Judaism answered this question? Rabbi Eckstein provides an answer to this question, "It was this dilemma that prompted many rabbis to claim that evil and Satan as ontological forces do not, in fact, exist, but are only perceived as such by man" (Eckstein 67).

This method of negating evil initially satisfies the atheists demand that the Theist drop one of the two logically inconsistent premises of theism. However, the quasi theist's proposed premise, when substituted for the removed premise, is neither satisfactory to most theists nor atheists. This approach to evil, or rather non-approach to evil, has long been regarded by scholars as an easy escape route to a difficult problem. Winfried Corduan, a theistic philosopher, argues that the problems with evil as an illusion are manifold. Corduan attacks the "evil as illusion" position by granting first, the truth of the premise, that evil is an illusion, and second, by showing the logical absurdity of accepting such a premise. If evil is an illusion, Corduan argues, what is the status of the illusion? Is the illusion good or bad? Those who promote the "evil as an illusion" argument tell us that we need to get beyond the illusion because clinging to such an illusion will cause us pain. Corduan responds to this warning by showing the logical inconsistency within the position, "Then the illusion itself is evil, and there is an objective standard of good and evil after all. Calling evil an illusion briefly postpones the problem, but we still have to deal with the fact that we are beset by an evil illusion" (Corduan 130).

Because of the internal problems found within the quasi theist's proposition that evil does not exist, we will now concentrate our efforts utilizing the traditional evil-acknowledging rendition of theism in solving the logical problem of evil.

A REBUTTAL

It is widely recognized among critics and defenders of theism that the premise that God is omnipotent and wholly good (1), does not necessarily imply that evil cannot exist (-2). If there is a contradiction here, it is *implicit* rather than *explicit*. What the critic must provide then is a third proposition concerning premise (1) or (2) that would make the three propositions an explicitly contradictory set. Seeking to create an explicitly contradictory argument, J.L. Mackie proposes that, "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" (Mackie 93). Mackie's additional premises providing for an explicit contradicting set can be stated as follows:

- (1a) A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can
- (1b) There are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.

No theistic philosopher has done as much damage to the atheists claim of inconsistency than Alvin C. Plantinga (1932-). Plantinga, in his work *God, Freedom, and Evil*, responds to both propositions (1a) and (1b) as presented by Mackie. The first step Plantinga takes in refuting Mackie's claims is to question Mackie's interpretation of the term omnipotence. Plantinga rightfully asserts that the term omnipotence does not mean that there are no limits to what the omnipotent being can do. What does it mean, then, to say that God is omnipotent? The natural response is to say that He is all-powerful or almighty; there is nothing that God cannot do. But does this make sense? Plantinga asks the question, can God create square circles, for example, or married bachelors? Plantinga

asserts that there are certain actions which are impossible for God to perform, "Most theologians and theistic philosophers, who hold that God is omnipotent, do not hold that he can create square circles or bring it about that he both exists and does not exist" (Plantinga *God* 17-24). Plantinga further explains the term omnipotence in terms of there being no non-logical limits. That is, there are no non-logical limits to what an omnipotent being can do. Conversely, theologians and theistic philosophers do not believe that an omnipotent being can bring about logically impossible states of affairs or cause necessarily false propositions to be true.

It is important to remember that when one proposes a claim of inconsistency against traditional theism, the critic is wise to suggest counter-claims using essential elements of theism. The critic may very well find a set of propositions that form a logical inconsistency concerning theism, but doing so is inane unless the propositions are central to the theistic position. Mackie, then, appears to have committed this blunder in his proposition concerning omnipotence, and Plantinga makes short work of discrediting it. If it is agreed that Plantinga has discredited Mackie's claim (1b), then we can now concentrate our efforts at examining Mackie's second claim concerning the actions of a good thing (premise 1a).

Mackie's second claim is that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can. Is this proposition necessarily true? Plantinga illustrates with a story of a mountain climber that this proposition is not necessarily true. Paraphrased, the story line flows as follows: A novice mountain climber suffers a painful injury to his leg while climbing a difficult summit. The mountain climber then calls upon his friend, a physician, to cure his injury, which is an evil state of affairs. The physician predicts that the injury will leave on its own accord given a few days rest. The physician then states that the only thing he could do to eliminate the pain immediately would be to amputate the leg at the climber's knee.

Plantinga's point, then, is that a good thing, namely the physician, has the power to eliminate the evil state of affairs, the pain of the injured knee, but chooses not to. Does the failure of the physician to remove the evil state of affairs imply that the physician is no longer a good thing? Of course not. It is entirely possible that a good thing fail to eliminate an evil that it knows about and is capable of eliminating. The elimination of the present evil state of affairs would lead to a greater state of evil.

Mackie might benefit from a revision of his above proposition (1a) to state that an omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate without bringing about a greater evil state of affairs (1c). If the theist grants validity to Mackie's revision, the set of propositions now follows as such:

- (1) God is omnipotent and wholly good
- (1c) An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate without bringing about a greater evil state of affairs
- (2) Evil exists.

Does this revision of Mackie's premise concerning the actions of a good thing solidify the atheistic position? Hardly. At best, this argument is still only *implicitly* contradictory, while what we seek is an *explicitly* contradicting set (see Lauder page 10).

A POSSIBILITY

From Augustine to Plantinga, the most popular rationale for God's allowance of evil is man's free will. The theory, simply stated, is that God gave man free will and with it, the possibility of doing both good and evil acts. God could not have eliminated evil without eliminating man's freedom; evil, then, is the unavoidable condition to make human free will a possibility. Plantinga states that the heart of the "Free Will Defense" is, "the claim that it is *possible* that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contained moral evil. And if so, then it is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil" (Plantinga *God* 31).

When considering the “Free Will Defense”, two important distinctions need to be noted. The first is the concept of a free action. According to the free will defender, an action *r* is a free action if and only if the person doing *r* is both free to perform *r* and free to refrain from performing *r*; no preceding conditions and/or causal laws determine that he/she will perform the action or that he/she won't perform the action. Second, the Free Will Defense is not an attempt to provide a Free Will Theodicy. The latter is an attempt to provide what God's reason *is* for permitting evil, while the former is an attempt to show what God's reason *might possibly be* for permitting evil. One such theodicy given by Augustine, an early Christian Church philosopher-theologian, argues that God has created a more perfect universe through the allowance of evil than He could have by refusing to do so. God's goodness and generosity is exhibited because He has not refrained from creating us; a creature that He foreknew would not only sin, but also remain in the will to sin. This theodicy of Augustine exhibits his great reverence for the gift of free will. The great worth of this gift is explicated in the following analogy:

As 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 ("The Problem of Free Choice" 14-15).

According to Augustine, the best universe requires the existence of free, rational, and moral agents; some of which perform evil acts. However, the existence of moral evil performed by free creatures is much better than a universe lacking both the free creatures and the evil they produce. This theodicy, then, specifies the reason *why* God permits evil versus a free will defense that would offer a *possible* reason why God allows evil. This distinction between the two is important because the free will defender need not claim or even believe that the “Free Will Defense” proposition is true. Rather, the free will defender need only show that the “Free Will Defense” proposition is consistent with the

propositions (1) and (2) above. With this in mind, we can explore Plantinga's third proposition providing consistency between propositions (1) and (2).

Following an Augustinian line of thinking, Plantinga asserts that a world containing creatures who are significantly free is more valuable than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He cannot cause or determine them to do only what is right. If He does so, then they are not significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. If God has created creatures capable of moral good, there must also be the capacity to perform moral evil; these creatures cannot be free to perform moral evil and at the same time be prevented from doing so.

Following this, Plantinga suggests that God did in fact create significantly free creatures; but some of them went wrong in the exercise of freedom: this is the source of moral evil. What does this presence of moral evil say about the nature of God? Plantinga offers the following:

That fact that these 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 excising the possibility of moral good (Plantinga *The Nature* 166-167).

The free will defender's third proposition providing consistency between propositions (1) and (2) can be stated as follows: God, being omnipotent, chose to give man significant free will and could not have created a world with significantly free creatures that only performed moral good without the option of performing moral evil. With this in mind, we can now outline the "Free Will Defense" that includes proposition (1a):

- (1) God is omnipotent and wholly good
- (1a) God, being omnipotent, chose to give man significant free will and could not have created a world with significantly free creatures that only performed moral good without the option of performing moral evil
- (2) Evil exists.

The most prevalent objection to the "Free Will Defense" argues that it is logically possible that God, being omnipotent, could have created a world containing significantly free creatures that never chose to do evil. After all, if God is truly omnipotent, He could bring about any logical state of affairs. The typical free will response argues this assertion is self-contradictory. If God is to provide significant free will to man, the action taken by the free creature is entirely up to man and cannot be determined by God. Certainly it is possible that God could have made a world containing creatures that only performed good actions, but if God also grants man significant freedom, He cannot limit man's actions to only good actions. The option to do wrong must be available to the creature if that creature is truly free.

Proponents of the logical problem of evil have diminished in the last two decades due to Plantinga's "Free Will Defense". It is widely recognized that the logical problem of evil has been neutralized through the "Free Will Defense". The most recent attacks on Theism have shifted gears and now pursue the evidential problem of evil.

THE EVIDENTIAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

The difference between the logical problem of evil and the evidential problem of evil is often seen as a subtle difference. Even so, the distinction is important. As we have seen in the preceding argument, the logical problem of evil asserts that it is logically impossible for the existence of an omnipotent and wholly good God to coexist with the presence of evil. The evidential problem of evil argues that the coexistence of an omnipotent, wholly good God and evil is implausible. The evidential problem of evil concerns itself not with logic, as the logical problem does, but rather with whether the Theist can provide a reasonable explanation that would answer the question, "Why does evil exist." We will soon see that the "Free Will Defense" is not only applicable to the logical problem of evil, but also to the evidential problem of evil.

THE THREE EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENTS

A brief exploration of the evidential problem of evil would reveal to the inquirer that this particular argument against theism usually presents itself in one of three ways in the literature. The first argues that theism is improbable due to the sheer existence of evil. The second suggests theism is improbable because large amounts, extreme kinds, and perplexing distributions of evil exist. The third type of evidential argument suggests theism is improbable because gratuitous, or pointless evil, exists. We will explore each of these forms of the evidential argument in detail and in the order that they were presented.

The evidential argument from the sheer existence of evil can be outlined as follows:

(1a) The existence of evil

provides counter-evidence against the claim that

(2) An omnipotent and wholly good God exists.

It isn't hard to see that this form of argument has the same shortcomings as the logical problem of evil. The critic here is assuming that God would not allow for any form of evil to exist. The atheist here uses assumptions that the theist either does not or need not accept. As stated earlier, to properly attack a belief system, one must provide an attack that concerns itself with essential, internal elements of the system itself. To offer an attack with external positions is to reduce the disagreement to mere name calling or backbiting.

Most critics agree that the mere existence of evil does not provide for a strong argument against theism. Instead, they focus their attention on the large amount of evil that exists as evidence against the belief in God. This brings us to the second type of evidential argument; the argument from large amounts, extreme kinds, and perplexing distributions of evil. The argument is summarized here:

(1b) Because large amounts, extreme kinds, and perplexing distributions of evil exist,

it is implausible to believe that

(2) An omnipotent and wholly good God exists.

Theists generally reply to this proposition by attacking the atheist's assumption that God would only allow a certain amount of evil to exist. This assumption is difficult to prove. It is difficult for finite beings to determine an infinite being's level of toleration concerning evil. Can we truly know how much evil is too much evil according to God? Monotheistic religions do not offer any clear limit placed upon evil by God. However, for a theist to deny that large amounts or extreme kinds of evil exist is not only denying the obvious, but is also counter-productive if dialogue between theists and nontheists is desired. Instead, the theist can accept the proposition that large and extreme kinds of evil do, in fact, exist, but they could also argue that this neither supports nor argues against the existence of God. Unless we can determine how much evil is too much evil according to God's standards, we cannot assert that the present state of large and extreme kinds of evil far exceed God's standard simply because we perceive it as such.

The third and final type of evidential reasoning argues that the existence of gratuitous or pointless evil makes the belief in an omnipotent, wholly good God implausible. Outlined simply, the argument flows as follows:

(1c) The existence of gratuitous or pointless evil argues against the proposition that

(2) An omnipotent and wholly good God exists.

This argument, as stated thus far, is only implicitly contradictory because the existence of an omnipotent and wholly good God does not conclusively indicate that gratuitous evil should not exist. Therefore, an additional assumption must be made that would imply that gratuitous evil cannot coexist with an omnipotent and wholly good God. The additional assumption that has been traditionally regarded as a sound hypothesis by both

atheists and theists alike is called meticulous providence (MP). This assumption of meticulous providence states the following:

(MP) An omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God would prevent or eliminate the existence of really gratuitous or pointless evils.

The addition of this premise (MP) now changes the argument from gratuitous evil to the following:

1. If (2) is true, then, assuming that (MP) is true, (1c) should not be true.
2. It is probable that (1c) is true.
3. Therefore, it is probable that (2) is false.

Simply stated, if God is omnipotent and wholly good and employs meticulous providence, gratuitous evil should not exist. It is probable that gratuitous evil does, in fact, exist. Therefore, God as an omnipotent and wholly good God is probably false.

As stated above, this premise has long been accepted by theists as well as by atheists. What naturally follows is that the theist rejects that such gratuitous evils do exist. The theist will attempt to show that the apparent gratuitous evil has a purpose that promotes some act of good (e.g., suffering builds character, which is good). Traditional theists have been met with both success and failure when utilizing this approach. Critics argue that the theist may be able to explain away some evils as nongratuitous, but they cannot succeed in explaining away all instances of apparent gratuitous evil. The critics provide an internal criticism of theism based on the theistic view of man in light of God's creation. Theism, particularly the Judeo-Christian tradition, holds that God has created man with generally trustworthy, rational, and moral faculties. The critics argue that to deny the experiences of both laymen and philosophers that recognize various instances of gratuitous evil is to call into question the reliability of God's gift of rationality to man.

Admittedly, it can be difficult to accept the proposition that no gratuitous evils exist. The heinous act of placing a newborn child into a garbage dumpster with the intent

that it will starve to death, or the slaughter of innocent Jews at the hands of the Nazi's, is hard to accept as promoting a greater good.

Theodore Dreiser, an American novelist, was fascinated by the natural processes and their meaning. Dreiser wrote a novel based on a character named Frank Cowperwood that explores what seems to be a gratuitous evil. In the story, while either heading home from school or walking to the bank to see his father, Frank would pass by a fish-market which was known for a certain tank in the front of the store where certain odd specimens of sea-life were kept. One day, Frank saw a squid and a lobster put into the tank. The lobster, it appeared from the talk of the idle bystanders, was offered no food, as the squid was considered his rightful prey. The lobster lay at the bottom of the clear glass tank upon the yellow sand, apparently seeing nothing, for no one could tell in which way his beady, black buttons of eyes were looking. Apparently its eyes were never off the body of the squid. The squid, pale and waxy in texture, looking very much like pork fat or jade, moved about the tank in torpedo fashion, but his movements were never out of the sight of his enemy, for by degrees, small portions of the squid's body began to disappear, snapped off by the claws of the lobster. The lobster would leap to where the squid was apparently idly dreaming, and the squid would dart away, shooting out a cloud of black ink, behind which it would disappear. However, this was not always successful. Small portions of the squid's body and tail were frequently left in the claws of the lobster below. Frank was so fascinated by this drama that he would return to the fish-market daily to watch. One morning, Frank stood in front of the tank with his nose pressed to the glass. He saw that only a portion of the squid remained, and his ink-bag was near empty. In the corner of the tank sat the monster poised for action. Dreiser continues the story:

The boy stayed as long as he could, the bitter struggle fascinating him. Now, maybe, or in an hour or a day, the squid might die, slain by the lobster, and the lobster would eat him. He looked again at the greenish-copperish engine of destruction in the corner and wondered when this would be (Dreiser 10-13).

Although this particular instance of evil is connected with the animal world, the human world is not immune to similar instances of gratuitous evil. The theist, then, is presented with numerous options concerning gratuitous evil. The question becomes, "How can theism deal with what appears to be pointless evil?" One option is to continue to deny that gratuitous evils exist, which we noted early has resulted in widespread disapproval. Another option, which has been pursued by many contemporary theists, is to accept the overwhelming evidence that gratuitous evil exists. The result of this acceptance of gratuitous evil is the denial of the premise we earlier called meticulous providence (MP).

Such is the method taken by free will defenders, such as Alvin Plantinga. Earlier we noted that the free will defender holds a free act to be significantly free under the following conditions: an action r is a free action if and only if the person doing r is both free to perform r and free to refrain from performing r ; no preceding conditions and/or causal laws determine that he/she will perform the action or that he/she won't perform the action. The point pushed here by free will defenders argues that if an action is to be significantly free, the creature must be allowed to perform the highest possible good and must also be allowed to perform the most terrible evils. When God allows these terrible evils to be performed, the result is gratuitous evil. God could have prevented gratuitous acts from occurring, but in the process, he would also be restricting free choice and trivializing the gift of free will. The free will defenders argue that God wanted man to be able to freely choose to follow Him, or freely choose not to. The risk God has taken in preserving man's significant free will is the allowance of gratuitous evil to exist in His creation. If the free will defender's notion of significant free will and the denial of meticulous providence is accepted, then we have an answer to the evidential problem of gratuitous evil.

NATURAL EVIL

Up to this point, much of the discussion has revolved around acts of evil, which are the result of man's free will. This type of evil, which stems from man's decision to perform them, is often called moral evil. What, then, shall we say about instances of evil that are not the result of man's significant free will, i.e. hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and so on? These natural actions often cause as much or more evil than moral evils do. Surely, we can hold God accountable for these evils. Free will defenders have taken this type of evil, natural evil, into consideration within the "Free Will Defense." Some within Judaism, and most within Christianity, subscribe to the belief in nonhuman beings or spirits. These nonhuman spirits were given the same freedom that man so enjoys and abuses. Some of these nonhuman spirits, Satan and his band, freely chose to rebel against God and the result was banishment from God's kingdom. The Old Testament book of Job presents Satan as an evil being whose primary domain seems to be the earth. While Satan's time here on Earth is limited, he exercises his free will by creating the evils that occur through nature. So natural evil sharply resembles moral evil in that it is the result of a free action by a free creature. The free will defense, then, is not only limited to moral evil, but applies to natural evil as well.

REFLECTION

This paper, as suggested by its title, is by no means an exhaustive exploration of the problem of evil. The amount of literature written on this subject could pack the Library of Congress ten times over. However, what has been presented in this paper covers the major themes and most credible theistic responses concerning the problem of evil.

Having considered these major themes, we are left with several options. One option is to reject the theistic defense of the plausibility of God's existence in light of the presence of evil. This route of reasoning has led many individuals to assume the

absurdity of evil and, more importantly, all of life in general. A second option is to accept the plausibility of God's existence but to deny the premise that He is both omnipotent or omnibenevolent; Mark Twain and Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, chose to follow this route. Finally, we can accept the validity of the theistic position presented thus far, and continue to look to divinely ordained freedom as the foundation for an acceptable theodicy.

It is important to note that this theodicy of freedom is not going to heal the deep wounds that evil can inflict upon a person. If we were to present the free will theodicy as a remedy to a young woman who had just suffered the loss of her child, she would certainly balk at such a proposition. What kind of God, she might ask, would allow such a thing to happen? What is this horrible, horrible freedom that God has given to mankind? In this type of situation what is needed is another person to listen and to grieve with the young mother. Analytical arguments and philosophical querying would only compound the pain that the mother was experiencing.

Additionally, the theist adhering to the "Free Will Defense" should not propose to know the particular answers to the universal questions of, "Why did this happen." It must never be forgotten that we are operating from a finite mind when we seek the answers to these questions within ourselves. The monotheistic scriptures speak of a Divine being who does not abide by our understanding of how things are supposed to be. In fact, so contrary are His actions to our understanding that Mark Twain once said that if God does exist then He is a hideous mongrel. Instead, the role of the "Free Will Defense" is to defend the theistic position against the anti-theistic accusations of inconsistency. This, then, is accomplished with the notion of freedom.

Works Cited

- Borowitz, Eugene. The Mask Jews Wear. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.
- Corduan, Winfried. No Doubt About It: A Case for Christianity. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997.
- Dreiser, Theodore. The Financier. New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1912.
- Eckstein, Rabbi Yechiel. What You Should Know About Jews and Judaism. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1994.
- Eddy, Mary Baker. Science and Health: With Key to the Scriptures. Boston: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1994.
- Mackie, J.L. "Evil and Omnipotence." The Philosophy of Religions. ed. Basil Mitchell, London: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- McCloskey, H.J. "The Problem of Evil." Journal of Bible and Religion 30 (1962): 187.
- Plantinga, Alvin C. God, Freedom, and Evil. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977.
- , The Nature of Necessity. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
- "The Problem of Free Choice", Vol. 22 of Ancient Christian Writers. Westminster, MD. :The Newman Press, 1955.
- Wiesel, Elie. Dimensions of the Holocaust. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1978
- , Night. New York: Hill & Wang, Inc., 1960.