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# Omnipotence, Omnibenevolence, and Evil

Emily McCarty

In his article, “New Puzzles about Divine Attributes,” Moti Mizrahi presents his own formulation of the problem of evil. He puts it as follows:

1. Either God can choose the lesser of two evils or God cannot choose the lesser of two evils.
2. If God can choose the lesser of two evils, then God is not omnibenevolent (since God can choose evil).
3. If God cannot choose the lesser of two evils, then God is not omnipotent (since there is a possible state of affairs that God cannot bring about).
4. (Therefore) Either God is not omnibenevolent or God is not omnipotent.<sup>1</sup>

Mizrahi claims that because of God’s goodness, he should not choose evil, and because of God’s power, he should be able to bring about any state affairs, even one where he must choose one of two evils. God’s attributes of goodness and power in light of evil are in question.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this paper is to defend the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God in light of the problem of evil. A logical solution and some moral solutions to this problem of evil will be offered.<sup>3</sup>

In *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Alvin Plantinga argues against J.L. Mackie’s formulation of the problem of evil argument using possible worlds.<sup>4</sup> Mackie’s formulation is as follows:

1. God is omnipotent.

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<sup>1</sup> Moti Mizrahi, “New Puzzles About Divine Attributes,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5, no 2 (June 2013): 153.

<sup>2</sup> Mizrahi, “New Puzzles About Divine Attributes,” 152-153.

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to class lecture and discussions for my understanding of these terms. David Beck, Class Lecture, PHIL 440: Philosophy of Religion, Liberty University, Spring 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 12-29. I must thank Dr. Beck and Dr. Provenzola for making me aware of Plantinga’s argument. I am indebted to them for pointing me in the direction of this argument, either in passing comment or in class lecture. Their discussion and terminology in discussing the work have been helpful in my understanding of it.

2. God is wholly good.
3. Yet evil exists.
4. Good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.
5. There are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do
6. A good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely.
7. The propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.<sup>5</sup>

Both Mackie and Mizrahi claim that God's goodness and his power are challenged by evil. For God to be omnipotent and omnibenevolent, evil must not exist at all. Plantinga responds to this assumption by claiming that God has a reason for "permitting evil."<sup>6</sup> His response is a defense, not a theodicy: "[T]he aim is not to say what God's reason *is*, but at most what God's reason *might possibly be*."<sup>7</sup> The reason only has to be a "consistent" reason to reconcile God's attributes of omnipotence and omnibenevolence with evil's existence.<sup>8</sup> This paper will apply Plantinga's answers to Mizrahi's argument.

I should emphasize that a defense can be used to argue that God has a "consistent" reason for permitting evil, not that this is God's reason.<sup>9</sup> One "does *not* claim to know or even believe that r [the reason] is true."<sup>10</sup> In other words, "A defense...makes no claims about the way the actual world is or about any actual intentions and reasons for allowing evil on the part of God."<sup>11</sup> The reason doesn't have to be the "actual" reason, but a defense "doesn't rule out" that the reason argued for is that very reason.<sup>12</sup> Eleonore Stump explains that "[A] defense describes a

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<sup>5</sup> J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in *The Power of God: Readings on Omnipotence and Evil*, eds. Linwood Urban and Douglas N. Walton, (New York: Oxford, 1978), 18. Mackie's argument is also discussed in Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 12-24. My set up of Mackie's argument is influenced by his discussion.

<sup>6</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 28-31, 7-11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. Emphasis Plantinga's.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. I was helped here with the phrasing by one of the editors.

<sup>9</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 28-29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29. Quote taken from page 28. Emphasis Plantinga's.

<sup>11</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University, 2010), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 19.

possible world that contains God and suffering and that is similar to the actual world, at least in the sense that it contains human beings, natural laws, and evils much like those in our world; and then the defense proposes a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing evil in such a possible world."<sup>13</sup> In this paper, the reasons given are ones that God *could* have for allowing evil. Because a defense "doesn't rule out" particular reason, one must be open to considering these reasons "in the actual world."<sup>14</sup> These reasons are not definitive but are to be evaluated as to how they reconcile God's attributes with the existence of evil. This paper will also adopt a defense stance.<sup>15</sup>

Plantinga argues in defense of God's goodness that a good being is not required to eradicate every evil: "It is entirely possible that a good person fail to eliminate an evil state of affairs that he knows about and can eliminate. This would take place, if...he couldn't eliminate the evil without bringing about a greater evil."<sup>16</sup> One "*properly eliminates* an evil state of affairs if it eliminates that evil without either eliminating an outweighing good or bringing about a greater evil."<sup>17</sup> Plantinga claims that the same can be argued of God:

Under what conditions would an omnipotent being be unable to eliminate a certain evil *E* without eliminating an outweighing good? Well, suppose that *E* is *included* in some good state of affairs that outweighs it. That is suppose that there is some good state of affairs *G* so related to *E* that it is impossible that *G* obtain or be actual and *E* fail to obtain....Now suppose that some good state of affairs *G* includes an evil state of affairs *E* that it outweighs. Then not even an omnipotent being could eliminate *E* without eliminating *G*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>15</sup> I must thank an editor for prompting me to emphasize this part of the argument.

<sup>16</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 18, 19. Quote taken from page 19.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 20. Emphasis Plantinga's.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22. Emphasis Plantinga's.

For God to eliminate this evil, he would also have to eliminate other goods, possibly other outweighing goods. He could not merely do away with the evil state of affairs: the good state of affairs would be eliminated as well, as its existence was dependent upon the evil state obtaining. God would improperly eliminate the evil in this instance. Rather than a strike against God's omnipotence, God's permitting evil is how he allows goods. God permits evil rather than chooses it. Mizrahi's objection is reframed. When faced with evil, God can permit it in order to allow an "outweighing good."

While Plantinga lists some goods that can arise from suffering, such as virtues,<sup>19</sup> this is not the particular good that he is after on this defense. Rather, free will is this good.<sup>20</sup> Free will is not inherently evil, but to allow for it, evil must be allowed.<sup>21</sup> Plantinga explains:

A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely....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.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Flemming, "Omnibenevolence and Evil." *Ethics* 96, no.2 (January 1986): 268-270, accessed 28 March 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2381377>. Flemming's discussion of Plantinga here is clarifying. Also, Thomas Provenzola point out the same in Epistemology class lecture. Thomas Provenzola, Class Lecture, PHIL 420: Classical and Religious Epistemology, Liberty University, Spring 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 30, 31.

For the actions that we perform to be truly good, we must be free; otherwise our actions do not produce “*moral good*”.<sup>23</sup>

Before we can see the relationship to Mizrahi’s argument, we should examine the relationship of free will to evil. Plantinga argues that God could not have created any world he wanted.<sup>24</sup> We must explain two features of this argument before proceeding. First, Plantinga points out that “God actualizes states of affairs,” but he does not “create” them.<sup>25</sup> God creates people and actualizes worlds and states of affairs but does not create states of affairs or possible worlds.<sup>26</sup> Second, God’s omnipotence does not allow him to supervene or contradict logic: “[N]ot even an omnipotent being can bring about logically impossible states of affairs or cause necessarily false propositions to be true.”<sup>27</sup> In keeping with the logically possible, God could not change the way things are or make things to happen contrary to fact.<sup>28</sup> Plantinga illustrates this point with the example of Maurice and his decision to eat oatmeal for breakfast. There are two possible worlds, one in which Maurice eats oatmeal and another in which he does not. The actual world will contain whichever choice Maurice makes. God, however, cannot create the world in which the opposite choice is made, nor will he override Maurice’s free will. Plantinga explains why:

If we consider a world in which S’ obtains and in which Maurice freely chooses oatmeal at time t, we see that whether or not it is within God’s power to actualize it depends upon what Maurice would do if he were

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 29-31. Emphasis Plantinga’s. I was also helped here by philosophy of religion class lecture. David Beck, Class Lecture, PHIL 440: Philosophy of Religion, Liberty University, Spring 2015. Flemming also notes that “[God’s] reason may be that moral *goodness* requires free will, too.” Flemming, “Omnibenevolence and Evil,” 268.

<sup>24</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 38-44.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 17, 18. See also his definition of necessity: “a proposition is necessarily true if it is impossible that it be false, or if its negation is not possibly true.” Ibid., 14.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 38-44.

free in a certain situation. Accordingly, there are any number of possible worlds such that it is partly up to Maurice whether or not God can actualize them....But if [God] creates Maurice and creates him free with respect to this action, then whether or not he actually performs the action is up to Maurice, not God.<sup>29</sup>

Maurice's choice determines which world will be actualized by God. In the Maurice example, Plantinga has one assume that Maurice eats oatmeal for breakfast (which is the actual world) and shows that God cannot make it that Maurice does not eat oatmeal, for that would make a false proposition true.<sup>30</sup> In other words, God will not supervene on one's free will. Plantinga's argument, contra Mizrahi, claims that there is a state of affairs that God could not have brought about because of our free will. However, this notion needs to be filled out a bit more to answer Mizrahi's problem of evil more precisely.

Plantinga argues that the presence of transworld depravity, a condition such that a person will have "gone wrong" in regards to a free action, partially explains why God could not have created a world with no evil.<sup>31</sup> If each person has transworld depravity, "Such persons go wrong with respect to at least one action in any world God could have actualized and in which they are free with respect to morally significant actions; so the price for creating a world in which they produce moral good is one in which they produce moral evil."<sup>32</sup> This is a problem of essence. A person's essence—"the set of properties essential to him"—is theirs in all possible worlds.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 42-44. Quote taken from page 44.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 47, 48-49.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 49-52.

Transworld depravity is such a part of our essence that for God to create such a world with no evil, he would have to create a world of people that is not us.<sup>34</sup> Plantinga writes,

[I]f an essence *E* suffers from transworld depravity, then it was not within God's power to actualize a possible world *W* such that *E* contains the properties *is significantly free in W* and *always does what is right in W*...[I]f every essence suffers from transworld depravity, then no matter which essences God instantiates, the resulting persons, if free with respect to morally significant actions, would always perform at least some wrong actions. If every essence suffers from transworld depravity, then it was beyond the power of God Himself to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.<sup>35</sup>

God doesn't interfere with our essence or our free will. He preserves a great good, our free will, and does not use his power to override our wills or force us to do good.<sup>36</sup> Mizrahi writes, "[I]n more recent literature, the concept of omnipotence has been understood in terms of the power to bring about certain possible states of affairs, where states of affairs are propositional entities that either obtain or fail to obtain."<sup>37</sup> This should mean that God can "bring about the state of affairs where that being chooses the lesser of two evils."<sup>38</sup> This paper has argued that God can "bring about" states of affairs, but not any. God permits evil, not chooses it, because of the good of free will. Mizrahi's conception is wrong.

If one accepts Plantinga's premise that moral good comes from a free will, then our wills have to be free in order for us as individuals to bring good into this world. Plantinga defines

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 49, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 53. Emphasis Plantinga's.

<sup>36</sup> See also Flemming's discussion of Plantinga's use of freewill. Flemming, "Omnibenevolence and Evil," 268-270. His thought was helpful to developing this part of the argument.

<sup>37</sup> Mizrahi, "New Puzzles about Divine Attributes," 152.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 152.



“significantly free” as “free with respect to a morally significant action.”<sup>39</sup> If God were to “determine [free creatures] to do only what is right,” “then they are not morally free after all; they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, he had to create creatures capable of moral evil....He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.”<sup>40</sup> To put it another way, for good to be good, it must be freely chosen. Evil is a possibility for those with transworld depravity as long as good can be freely chosen as well.<sup>41</sup>

However, some would object that Plantinga’s reason does not meet the challenge. Eleonore Stump notes that Plantinga’s defense doesn’t fully address God’s goodness nor gives “reasons morally sufficient for God’s allowing suffering.”<sup>42</sup> Flemming claims that Plantinga’s defense, while maintaining that free will allows for true good, does not show how such a good will give “any benefit to individuals” and so does not demonstrate God’s goodness.<sup>43</sup> One needs a moral solution to the problem of evil which “would show not only that r is a reason for permitting evil but also that it is actually a good reason, whether or not in fact God acts on it.”<sup>44</sup> Arguments that claim that evil produces virtue in the individual “do not show that he would be worse-off without the suffering-cum-virtue, and so they fall short of supplying the justification the theist needs.”<sup>45</sup> The good from suffering must also be personal for the sufferer: “benevolence would be shown only if the suffering allowed were *good for him*, or much more rarely, if it were

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<sup>39</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 39.

<sup>40</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30. Emphasis Plantinga’s.

<sup>41</sup> I was helped here by class lecture. David Beck, Class Lecture, PHIL 440: Philosophy of Religion, Liberty University, Spring 2015. I must thank one of the editors for prompting me to include some explanation of free will as a good.

<sup>42</sup> Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 20-21.

<sup>43</sup> Flemming, “Omnibenevolence and Evil,” 269.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-262.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

sufficiently good for someone else.”<sup>46</sup> The good arising from suffering must enhance the person or persons involved. Plantinga has not addressed omnibenevolence to the greatest extent that he could, and perhaps if the notion of goods involved with the presence of evil were developed, one could have a stronger defense against claim’s such as Mizrahi’s that God’s attributes and his permitting of evil are exclusive.

Flemming offers his own reasons why God permits evil and suffering and connects those reasons with the aforementioned benefits a sufferer might gain. He defines omnibenevolence as “an intentional disposition to confer benefits on others, but with this special property: its object will be all the benefits that can logically be realized together.”<sup>47</sup> This will also be my operational definition of omnibenevolence. To demonstrate how evil can be a benefit to us, Flemming expands an example of Hume’s to show that suffering “provide[s] others with an opportunity to show goodwill.”<sup>48</sup> Hume thought that if no one lacked anything, and nature stepped in to make “distribution” fair, then there would be no need of human justice.<sup>49</sup> Flemming replaces God with nature, and argues that God’s stepping in at every bit of evil, including those we fail to do anything about, would take away opportunities to show goodness towards one another; we would not understand what evil is.<sup>50</sup> Flemming gives the example of a man seeing a child running towards a street with an oncoming car and not being able to recognize that the child could get hurt.<sup>51</sup> Because the man had never seen a child struck by a car before, he would not have the “empirical base” with which to know the child was in trouble and consequently to help: “the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 266. Emphasis Flemming’s.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 272-273.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 273. I must thank Dr. Beck who prompted me to take a second look at Flemming’s argument here.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 273-274.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 273-274.

antecedent cognitive and motivational conditions for benevolence would be missing.”<sup>52</sup> If God removed all the evil on small scale, then we would not develop benevolence in our actions towards each other.<sup>53</sup> Friendship is another good that comes out of learning the virtues, and virtues, such as benevolence, allow us to interact in relationship with another person, including God.<sup>54</sup> These virtues help us learn to “love” each other.<sup>55</sup> He then concludes:

If (a) the virtues can be exercised only in a world which contains some evil and (b) the communal benefits are possible only where there are occasions to exercise the virtues or character traits just like them, then some evil will be necessary if the world is to include these benefits. As sovereign of the world, then, with control over the amount and distribution of evil, an omnibenevolent God may have to allow the evil which these goods require.<sup>56</sup>

God has reasons that befit his omnibenevolence for allowing evil. The virtue that one can develop in the presence of evil is a good to us, and provides a reason for God’s allowing evil in defense of his goodness. Flemming discusses instances where God has the power to get rid of evil,<sup>57</sup> but he ultimately concludes that God’s reason to permit evil is for us to learn virtue. For God to be omnibenevolent, all the “benevolence” cannot belong to him alone; God must allow us to learn it for us “to be the proper object of omnibenevolence.”<sup>58</sup> Evil can be a conduit for goods, and Mizrahi’s outdated notion that God cannot be both omnibenevolent and omnipotent is answered.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 273-276.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 274-276.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 275-277.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 277-278.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 269-271. Plantinga also discusses that God can get rid of evil before launching into his discussion. Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 9-10.

<sup>58</sup> Flemming, “Evil and Omnibenevolence,” 274

But one can find yet another good. Flemming suggested that to permit evil, one needs a reason that shows that the one who suffers loses something without the suffering. Eleonore Stump argues for just such a reason. She, too, offers a defense rather than a theodicy<sup>59</sup> and frames her discussion of evil in terms of suffering because of human element of the problem of evil: our experience of evil is what makes evil so troubling for us.<sup>60</sup> According to Stump, “what is in need of justification is God’s allowing suffering.”<sup>61</sup> She identifies two types of suffering.<sup>62</sup> Suffering can be identified first as “a matter of violating a person’s will...a contravention of something at the core of a person’s volitional structure.”<sup>63</sup> Her specific term for this core is “desires of the heart,” and this desire is “a person or project” to which one is deeply attached.<sup>64</sup> The second type of suffering is the deprivation of “flourishing,” a condition one is in, even unawares, which “undermines him and keeps him from the well-being that, without the evil, he could and should have had.”<sup>65</sup> She then explains that “what is bad about suffering, then, is that it undermines or destroys what the sufferer centrally cares about, her own flourishing or the desires of her heart or both.”<sup>66</sup> Suffering’s benefit must “enhance flourishing or contribute to one’s having one’s heart’s desires.”<sup>67</sup> She then lays out two criteria for suffering to be defeated: the benefit “outweighs the suffering” and comes exclusively through the suffering.<sup>68</sup>

Stump uses the suffering of biblical figures to point out that each person saw through their suffering the good that God had for them, and came to terms with their suffering to realize

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<sup>59</sup> Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 18-22. I must thank Dr. Beck for pointing me in the direction of this work for my argument.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

this benefit.<sup>69</sup> When one is willing, suffering can be “a means to inner healing and greater closeness with other persons, including God,” and justification and sanctification can include this suffering.<sup>70</sup> Man’s ultimate good is to be close to God, and his ultimate evil is to be forever separated from Him: “For Aquinas, the worst thing that can happen to a person is to become permanently psychically fragmented, permanently separated from oneself, permanently separated from others, including God....The greatest good for human beings is to be in a union of love with God.”<sup>71</sup> Because God is a person, our union with him “is the greatest of personal relationships.”<sup>72</sup> However, the will is afflicted with original sin which hinders union with God and causes “internal fragmentation”:

On Aquinas’ views, then, the obstacle to a person’s having the best thing for human beings, shared union with God, is that person’s internally divided state. Since the best thing for human beings and the worst thing for human beings are jointly exhaustive, warding off the worst thing for any human person is also a matter of healing this internally divided condition. Aquinas takes justification and sanctification to be the means by which a person is healed of this disease of the will; by these means, a person becomes internally integrated around the good. Each of these processes involves a human person’s giving up resistance to God.<sup>73</sup>

Because the suffering involved in justification and sanctification helps one avoid the “varieties of internal alienation,” its “benefits defeat suffering for that person.”<sup>74</sup> Stump says of her Biblical characters:

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 375-376. The narratives themselves are found on Ibid., 175-368.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 387.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 387.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 395.

In all the stories, then, in varying ways, each of the protagonists receives his own flourishing and greatness in exchange for what his suffering has deprived him of in his earthly life. On Aquinas's theodicy, that benefit is everlasting, and the exchange is one that every person ought to be willing to make because he receives vastly more of what he cares about than he loses in his suffering.<sup>75</sup>

Flemming's claim that there must be some value to one's suffering that one could not do without is responded to: "the negative value of the permanent absence of union with God outweighs the negative value of suffering of any other kind. Avoiding that outcome is, therefore, of more value for a person than avoiding any other kind of suffering."<sup>76</sup> If union with God is "the highest human good,"<sup>77</sup> and suffering brings that good, then on this account, God has very good reason for allowing suffering.

There is one objection to Stump's account to be considered. If God knows how someone will respond to suffering, does God have good reason in allowing that suffering in the life of someone who will reject the benefits, including a rejection of God?<sup>78</sup> Stump responds first that even if someone does not accept the benefits of suffering, suffering "wards off even further distance from God" and so can be a good thing.<sup>79</sup> Second, "there is something worthwhile in giving a person an opportunity for a good thing even if one were in a position to know he will not take that opportunity."<sup>80</sup> God's goodness can be defended in allowing suffering even if the suffering does not produce Aquinas' benefits.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 397.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 402-403. Stump calls this the "Molinist objection." I was prompted to include this objection after discussing this paper with a friend.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 403.

The reasons in this paper for God's permitting evil do not have to be true; their mere possibility renders them worthy of consideration.<sup>81</sup> In response to Mizrahi's argument that God could somehow "choose" evil, these possible reasons could be why God permits evil. God perhaps permits evil because our wills choose evil at times, but this freedom also allows us to choose good in order to bring true good into our world.<sup>82</sup> God perhaps permits evil in order that we develop the right response to evil in our world and that we would learn to "love"<sup>83</sup> each other. God perhaps permits evil so that we might come into union with him, which is perhaps the "highest human good."<sup>84</sup> These may not be the reasons that God holds, but these reasons could not be denied as the reasons that God has, either. These reasons are "consistent" reasons, if not *the* reasons, and lessens the force of Mizrahi's objections.<sup>85</sup> These reasons are "consistent" in that evil's existence does not conflict with God's attributes of omnipotence and omnibenevolence in some possible world.<sup>86</sup>

In all three accounts, evil can be a conduit for goods. God permits evil because of the good of our freewill; to teach us character and "love"; and to bring us to union with him. Mizrahi's claim that God must be either omnibenevolent or omnipotent in the presence of evil is rebutted. God permits evil because of the good of our free will, and this free will allows true moral good to become a part of the world through us. In respecting our free will, he allows evil but also good. If the presence of evil is the only way that we learn to do good to each other, and

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>82</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 45-53. See also Flemming, "Omnibenevolence and Evil," 269 for a discussion and an objection to how Plantinga presents this side of the argument. I was also helped here by class lecture. David Beck, Class Lecture, PHIL 440: Philosophy of Religion, Liberty University, Spring 2015.

<sup>83</sup> Flemming, "Omnibenevolence and Evil," 275-277.

<sup>84</sup> Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 387, 416.

<sup>85</sup> Stump claims that defenses can sharpen how the problem of evil is engaged with philosophically. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 20. See also Ibid., 19-20, for more on how reasons are used in a defense. Emphasis mine.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 19. Again, I must thank one of the editors for prompting me to emphasize the defense nature of the argument.

if this is a good, then evil is permissible as a conduit for this good. Suffering is a conduit for one to know God. If union with him is the greatest good, then God has another good reason for permitting evil, as this suffering can call us towards God. We have the reason of goods to reject Mizrahi's argument. Mizrahi's argument that God cannot be omnibenevolent and omnipotent in light of evil has been answered.



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