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CHRIST THE REDEEMER AND THE BEST OF ALL CREATABLE WORLDS: USING ALVIN PLANTINGA'S 'O FELIX CULPA' THEODICY AS A RESPONSE TO WILLIAM ROWE'S *CAN GOD BE FREE?* AND THE UNDERLYING EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

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Abstract

In his "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," William Rowe famously argues that there are no God justifying goods that we know of that can excuse God's allowing the very many widespread evils and horrors there are in our world. I argue that this forms the backbone of his 2004 volume entitled *Can God be Free?* in which he posits two further arguments: (1) God must create the best *of necessity* and is thereby not free and so not praiseworthy, and (2) God cannot create a best world (since there is no best) and so always does less than the best He can and is therefore morally culpable (and so, surpassable). What is more, even if God could have created a best world, Rowe finds it obvious that the actual world is not the best God could have done in creating a world since it includes such things as the Holocaust and other rampant evils and horrors.

The intent of this thesis, then, is to argue three things: (1) that God *is* free in a *significant way* to create (or refrain from creating) and is thereby worthy of our praise, (2) that there is no world-creating ethic to which God is beholden, and (3) that there is at least one God justifying good in the world that *we do* know of, namely, the incomparably great good of the divine incarnation and atoning work of Jesus the Christ. Following Alvin Plantinga's argument from his "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'" it is argued herein that there is no possible world that is of a greater value than a world that includes the divine incarnation and atoning work of the Divine Son. On this model, then, evil and suffering *must exist* because if they did not, then Jesus and His work would be unnecessary, and without these things there would be no best type of creatable world. In pitting Plantinga's theodical arguments against Rowe's latest contribution, we will see that God has done what Professor Rowe has wished all along: He has freely created a best of all possibly created worlds.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name….
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.

-Edward Mote (1797-1874)

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and the Way Ahead

The Problem of Evil (POE) has existed as a theo-philosophical issue since at least the time of Epicurus whose argument against the existence of God was famously restated through the voice of *Philo* in David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. He states it thusly:

> Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?[1]

This line of questioning forms the basis of the so-called logical problem of evil (LPE). This logical problem of evil as propounded by J.L. Mackie and others, essentially states that the propositions

(P) God exists, and

(Q) Evil exists

form an incoherent set. In other words, if evil exists (and clearly it does) then a God who is all-powerful and all-good cannot exist. Thankfully for the theist, Alvin Plantinga commandeered the Free Will Defense, ramming it headlong into the logical problem of evil, all but smashing it to pieces.[2]

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[1] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Nature Religion, the Posthumous Essays, Of the Immortality of the Soul, and Of Suicide, from an Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding of Miracles*, edited by Richard H. Popkin, 2d ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 63.

[2] See initially Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), and for a more thorough and philosophically nuanced treatment, see his *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), or his *The Nature of Necessity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006).

In more recent years, however, there has come along a less deductive and more abductive argument known as the evidential argument from evil (EAE). The argument basically states that because of the types and kinds of evil that exist in the world, because of the amounts of evil in the world, and because of the *particular* evils that exist in the world, it is highly implausible that the God of traditional Western theism exists. The version of the EAE that is perhaps the most well-known, and philosophically nuanced, comes from William Rowe who states his form of the argument as follows:

> P1: There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
>
> P2: An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
>
> C1: There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.[3]

The thrust of the argument, then, is that there must exist some "God-justifying-goods"[4] for (at least) the instances of intense suffering that we see in the actual world—the world God has supposedly created.

In his "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," Rowe offers up an instance of intense animal suffering, viz., a fawn that has been trapped by a fallen tree and consequently burns to death—slowly and agonizingly—in a forest fire. He wonders if it is reasonable to believe that there do exist some God-justifying-goods in the actual world that would make up for the fawn's suffering. Though Rowe does not say that it is *unreasonable* to believe that there are such God-justifying-goods, he does take it that it is much more reasonable to conclude—based

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[3] William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *The Problem of Evil,* ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 126-137.

[4] William L. Rowe, "Evil and God's Freedom in Creation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (April 1999), p. 103.

on our experiences of goods in the world—that there are not.[5] Though he argues that there is good reason to believe that there is no such God-justifying-good in a case of intense suffering like this, he is willing to allow that it is at least conceivable, if not somewhat plausible. But, what about in the case of a more sobering example? Rowe offers the following case: "in the actual world a little 5-year-old girl in Flint, Michigan, was brutally beaten, raped, and strangled on New Year's Eve a few years ago."[6] This example, combined with the fawn example, leads to a more general, and perhaps more telling question, viz., how reasonable is it to believe that there is a God-justifying-good for *all* the instances of intense suffering that occur daily in our world?[7] Certainly, this argument in and of itself is a very serious charge for the theist to deal with; however, Rowe has found a newer sort of problem for the theist, one that he feels "may require some significant revision in contemporary thinking about the nature of God."[8] It is this newer argument that will be our primary focus.

In October of 2002, William Rowe published an article entitled "Can God be Free?," followed by a book of the same title in 2004.[9] In each, he posits that the Western theistic conception of God is such that He is thought to be "a being whose goodness, knowledge, and power is such that it is inconceivable and logically impossible for any being, even God himself, to have a greater degree of goodness, knowledge, and power."[10] In other words, Rowe is dealing

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[5] Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 131.

[6] Rowe, "Evil and God's Freedom in Creation," p. 103.

[7] Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 131.

[8] Rowe(b), p. 2. (see n. 9 for details).

[9] Rowe has both an article and a book by the same title. The information for the article is: *Faith and Philosophy* 19 (October 2002), pp. 405-424. The information for the book is as follows: (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). From hereon, citations will read Rowe(a) for the article and Rowe(b) for the book.

[10] Rowe(b), p. 1.

with an Anselmian definition of God (i.e. the greatest conceivable being). He thinks problems arise with this conception of God, however, in at least two ways. The first problem Rowe sees is that such a God, so conceived, must *necessarily* do the best that He can. In the realm of God's creating a world (which is our focus herein), it seems He must necessarily create the best creatable world. Since by Rowe's lights, God's creating a world is a better action than not creating, then if God exists, He will *of necessity* create and create the best He can and is not, thereby, free to do otherwise. God is not free—or *significantly* free, at any rate—to do as he wills. If this is true then God is not worthy of humanity's worship and praise since He only did what He is obligated to do by His very nature and so has done nothing that is genuinely worthy of praise.

The second problem Rowe sees is that, since—by his lights—there is no *best* when it comes to world creation (i.e. for any world God creates He could always have created a better one), then God, being omniscient, knowingly does less good than He could have done.[11] The argument, then, is this: since for any world God creates there could always be a better one, it follows that the existence of a being that can create a better world than God is possible. The implications of such an argument for an Anselmian definition of God should be obvious. If some possible being can possibly create a better world than God, then God cannot be said to be morally unsurpassable, for His morality would be surpassed by the being that creates a better world. If God is not morally unsurpassable, then God (as He is understood in the Western theological traditions) cannot exist and be the creator of a world.

I suspect, however, that Rowe's EAE is behind his newer arguments in *Can God be Free?* and here is why. The theist seems to be cornered: she must either commit to arguing for

[11] He follows Leibniz here by quoting him thusly: "…as Leibniz tells us, 'to do less good than one could is to be lacking in wisdom or in goodness'." Rowe(b), p. 2.

God's being free to create a world since there *is no best world,* or commit to arguing that the *actual world* is the best of all possible creatable worlds. Seemingly, then, the theist must either forfeit God's moral unsurpassability, or she must forfeit God's freedom. If the former is true, then God is not the greatest conceivable being; if the latter, God is not praiseworthy for His creative actions and, moreover, the theist is "confronted with the further difficulty of having to believe that this world, with its Holocaust, and innumerable other evils, is the best that an infinitely powerful, infinitely good being could do in creating a world."[12] So, is the theist cornered? It is not obvious to me why she should think so; yet, because of Rowe's most recent thesis, there are now three main questions that the theist needs to answer in order to avoid Rowe's trap: (1) Is God free with respect to His creation of a world?, (2) Is God morally culpable with respect to the world He in fact creates (if He in fact creates)?, and (3) Is the actual world the best creatable world? (3), it seems to me, is the culminating question that results from Rowe's initial EAE, and a negative response thereof has as its results both (1) and (2), all of which appear to significantly undercut the common notion of God as traditionally understood in the West. The intent herein is to answer these questions.

In order to answer (1), I shall, in chapter two, need to spell out several issues with respect to Rowe's argument against God's freedom to create. The first issue that will need to be addressed is what it means for a world to be a *creatable* world. Second, there is the issue of God's divine attributes—his omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, etc.—and what they can be said to entail, or require, of God. And finally, and perhaps most important to Rowe's claims, there is the issue surrounding the concept of 'freedom': What exactly is 'freedom' when discussing *freely acting* agents? Does divine freedom (and so God) fall under this conception? *Can* divine freedom (and so God) fall under this conception? The aim of this chapter, then, is to

[12] Rowe(b), p. 2.

show that God is in fact free to create, whether or not He creates the best He can, just so long as it is either a "virtually empty world"[13] or a creatable world.

To answer (2), I shall, in chapter three, point out that it appears that Rowe is holding God to some sort of world-creating ethic by which God should be held morally culpable with respect to His creating a world. Against Rowe's claim, I will argue that God is not morally obligated to create any specific level of goodness and that there is no clear world-creating ethic to which God is beholden. Even supposing that there is a world-creating ethic of some sort, it seems God would be the ontological grounding of such a thing anyway and so this, in turn, will help dispel Rowe's notion of the possibility of a morally better world-creator in a no-best-world scenario.[14] Moreover, I intend to show in this chapter that Rowe's guidelines for 'good' worlds are, in fact, mistaken. 'Good' will be shown as having to do with much more than simply material goods, or the amount of properly behaving free agents (as on the Rowean account). My intent, then, is to argue three things: (a) that God is not morally culpable even given a Rowean world-creating ethic, (b) that it may not even be possible for another being to create a better world than God creates (if He creates) even given a no-best-world scenario, and (c) that Rowe's world-creating ethic is misguided and so does not harm specifically *Christian* theism.

This brings me to an important point. Getting clear on what we mean by the nebulous term 'God' is essential to my task. Rowe, of course, means by 'God' just the Anselmian idea of a greatest conceivable being; the concept shared by Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. But when a

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[13] The term *virtually empty world* is from Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder's "How an Unsurpassable Being can Create a Surpassable World," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (April 1994), p. 262. Basically, it is a world in which God exists and nothing else.

[14] I do not mean this in any Ockhamistic sense; rather I mean something similar to what William Lane Craig means when he says "…objective moral values are rooted in God. He is the locus and source of moral value. God's own holy and loving nature supplies the absolute standard against which all actions are measured." William Lane Craig and Paul Kurtz, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate: Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?" in *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2009), p. 30.

Christian theist uses the term 'God' she does not *merely* mean the Anselmian definition; rather, she means specifically the God that revealed Himself in the Person and Work of Jesus of Nazareth. So, as I am a Christian theist, my investigation into Rowe's claims will be made in light of specifically *Christian* theism. This is why, in chapter four, in order to answer (3), I will attempt to devise a specifically *Christocentric* theodicy. Specifically, I will be analyzing, and seeking to strengthen, Alvin Plantinga's 'O Felix Culpa'[15] theodicy (which states that Incarnation and Atonement—and so sin and evil—are necessary conditions of the best type of all possible worlds) so as to rebut Rowe's claim that it is rather implausible that the actual world is the best type of world an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God could create. If I am successful here, it will be apparent that the Christian does not have a problem of evil after all (Judaism and Islam are another story entirely), for God, by choosing to create a world that includes His incarnation and atoning work, has chosen to create the best of all possibly created worlds.

The intent, then, is threefold: first, it is to show that God is in fact free *in a significant (and, perhaps, libertarian) way* to create (or refrain from creating) any world He so chooses whether or not the world He chooses to create (if He chooses to create) is the best He can do. Second, it is to show that God is not morally obligated to create any specific level-of-goodness world and that there is no clear world-creating ethic to which God is beholden. And third—and perhaps most importantly—it is to show that the best creatable world is only possible through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ who ultimately recreates the world into the Kingdom of God. For now, though, let us turn to the first issue, namely, Rowe's claim that God is not free to create.

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[15] Alvin Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'," in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2004), pp. 1-25.

CHAPTER TWO

Is God Free to Create?

In order to have a proper understanding of Rowe's argument *vis a vis* God's freedom to create, an important distinction needs to be made, viz., the difference between a *possible* world and a *creatable* world and the reason that Rowe makes this distinction. So, what is a possible world? Alvin Plantinga defines a possible world as a maximal set of states of affairs *W* such that for any possible state of affairs *S, W* includes *S* or the negation of *S*.[16] Moreover, in a possible world, any logically possible proposition *P* is either true or false. Says Plantinga, "*P* is true in a world *W* if it is impossible that *W* be actual and *P* be false: more loosely, *P* is true in *W* if *P* would have been true had *W* been actual."[17] A possible world then is one that includes all co-possible states of affairs needed to make up that world. Suppose there is some world α that includes both Jones's being married and his being a bachelor at time *t*. Now, assuming he does not live a double life where two different states (or counties or some other such legal jurisdiction) have differing legal statuses for Jones, this state of affairs is impossible. It is both metaphysically and logically impossible; Jones cannot be both married and a bachelor at the same time or in the same sense (*ceteris paribus)* and so it should be clear that α cannot be a

[16] Alvin Plantinga, "Which Worlds Could God Have Created?" *The Journal of Philosophy* LXX (October 1973), pp. 539-540.

[17] Ibid., 540.

possible world. In fact, α is a metaphysically *impossible* world. A possible world then is any world *W* that includes a maximal set of *co-possible* states of affairs.

A *creatable* world then must be something different, something over and above its being a possible world. That is, it must be a world that God can possibly *actualize*.[18] To follow Plantinga once more, it is not proper to state that God creates a world in the sense that He brings to life its possible existence as a maximal set of states of affairs; rather, for God to create something in the strict sense, there must have been a time when that thing God creates did not exist.[19] This is not true for any possible world *W*. Remember that *W* is a maximal set of states of affairs and that states of affairs exist as possibilities (so long as they are not logically impossible states of affairs) necessarily. Just as God does not create Himself because He exists necessarily, or just as 2 + 2 is equal to 4 necessarily, any possible state of affairs—or maximal states of affairs—exists necessarily. So God does not, strictly speaking, *create* any possible world *W*; rather, he *actualizes* a possible world.[20] It is in this sense that it is meant for a 'creatable world' to be 'creatable.'

When Rowe speaks of God creating a best creatable world of necessity,[21] what does it mean for a world to be creatable over and above being possible? Cannot God create just any possible world? Though it certainly seems as though God—who is omnipotent—can create any possible world (for it does not violate the Law of Non-Contradiction, nor, if God can create it,

[18] For present purposes, *actualize* can mean God's weakly actualizing a world or his strongly actualizing a world; however, if one is to assume that human actions are free in the libertarian sense, then God, if He chooses to create humans, only weakly actualizes a world. I've gotten this language from Alvin Plantinga's *God, Freedom, and Evil*.

[19] Ibid., 540.

[20] Ibid., 540.

[21] Rowe(b), 2 (and throughout).

does it violate any of His divine attributes), this may not be so obviously the case. Following the 'Curly' example in Plantinga's famous Free Will Defense,[22] suppose a similar scenario:

John, an up-and-coming executive at a renowned university known for its moral character, is offered a promotion by Ron if he will simply extinguish the academic standards of admissions into the school in order to admit more students and collect more money. Though John works at a school that is supposed to represent moral character, he reacts in a way one seemingly comes to expect from a man in upper-management (no matter the institution) and accepts the promotion by willingly allowing the academic standards to be flushed down the proverbial toilet. Ron, being more morally corrupt than John, actually loses sleep at night wondering if he could have had John accept the promotion on the basis of not just flushing the academic standards, but also doing away with all student scholarships mid-semester.

Now, certainly, there is a possible world that includes John's freely[23] taking the promotion given the additional requirements, but there is also a possible world where he only freely accepts the promotion based on the first requirement and also a possible world where John freely does not take the promotion because his moral standards are too high. So, any of these situations is included in some possible worlds *W*, *W'*, and *W** (where *W* is a possible world at which John freely does not take the promotion on account of his moral code; *W'* is a possible world at which John freely accepts the one caveat to his promotion but not the other; and, *W** is a possible world at which John freely accepts both caveats). The question remains, however, could God have created just any one of these possible worlds? Considering that each world includes the free actions of human agents, it certainly does not seem so. If one takes into account

[22] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 173-180.

[23] The term 'freely' here, and throughout (at least in relation to human free action), is meant in the libertarian sense.

Plantinga's notion of *transworld depravity*,[24] then perhaps it is possible that at least one of these possible worlds God cannot create. By way of example, let *Wp* be a world where John never does anything morally reprehensible concerning his job and *Wx* be either *W'* or *W** as defined above; and let *S* equal a maximal world segment[25] such that it includes everything in *Wp* except John's decision regarding the promotion. If John is transworldly depraved, then for every *Wp* where John is free with respect to his decision regarding his moral actions and he always goes *right* with respect to those decisions there is some action *P* in *S* such that:

(i) *S* includes *P* being a morally significant action for John concerning his job

(ii) *S* includes John's being free with respect to *P*

(iii) *S* is included in *Wp* such that it neither includes John's decision to perform *P* nor his decision to refrain from performing *P*

and the empirical decision by John such that,

(iv) If *S* is included in *Wp*, John would freely go wrong with respect to *P*.[26]

If *S* is included in *Wp*, and *Wp* is a world where John never freely goes wrong with respect to his job, then there exists contradictory states of affairs in *Wp*. For in *S*, John freely goes wrong with respect to *P* which is included in *Wp* where John never freely goes wrong, which cannot be. Since *W* is included in *P* then God cannot create *W*, He can only create *Wx*. Therefore, it is possible that God cannot create just any possible world He so chooses. Rowe, then, does not argue that God must of necessity create the best *possible* world; rather, he argues that God must of necessity create the best *creatable* world. For not all possible worlds are

[24] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 48

[25] A 'maximal world segment' is Plantinga's idea from *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 46. A maximal world segment is a state of affairs *S* to which some other state of affairs compatible with but not included in *S* could be added and the result would be an entire possible world.

[26] The same argument is used in Plantinga's 'Curly' example. Ibid., pgs. 45-53

creatable, even by God. With this important facet of Rowe's argument defined, it is prudent to sketch out his argument against divine freedom and to briefly analyze the state of the current debate with respect to this same issue.

I. Divine Freedom: The Current Debate

In order to show that God, as he is traditionally understood, cannot be free with respect to his creative acts, Rowe argues as follows. First, since God classically construed is all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good, God must create the best world he can. Simply put, Rowe is arguing for

> (M) Given God's essential divine attributes, if there is a best world that God can create, then God *must* create that world.

Because Rowe thinks (M) is true, he further supposes that "'to do less good than one could do is to be lacking in wisdom or in goodness,' the most perfect understanding '*cannot fail* to act in the most perfect way, and consequently to choose the best.'"[27] In order to properly couch the argument with respect to God's freedom, Rowe further supposes (again with Leibniz) that there is such a thing as a best possible creatable world and that the creation of such a world is obviously better than not creating at all. Moreover, since "it appears to be inconceivable that a supremely perfect being would act to bring about less good than he can…[o]n the assumption that God (the supremely perfect being) exists and that there is a best creatable world, we've reached the conclusion that God is neither free not to create a world nor free to create a world less than the best creatable world."[28] Given God's essential nature, then, as one who is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, He is required to do the best that He can do; in this

[27] Here Rowe is quoting from Leibniz's *Theodicy* trans. E.M. Huggard, ed. Austin Farrer (LaSalle, Ill: Open Court, 1985), section 201. Emphasis is Rowe's, taken from Rowe(a), p. 409.

[28] Rowe(a), p. 410.

case, that is to create the best possible creatable world. For Rowe then, "God would of necessity create the best of the creatable worlds, leaving us with no basis for thanking him, or praising him for creating the world he does."[29]

Now that Rowe's argument with respect to this issue has been outlined, it seems prudent to examine—albeit briefly—what others in the field have to say. Perhaps the best known (or at least one of the best known) defense of God's freedom in creation comes from Robert Merrihew Adams. In his "Must God Create the Best?"[30] Adams argues that not only is God free to create a world, but he is free to create some world other than the best so long as none of the creatures is on the whole so miserable that it would be better if the creature did not exist. He likens God's freedom to create as He does (the type of world and, especially, the type of creatures) to a Goldfish breeder's freedom to breed Goldfish. While there are surely more excellent types of fish one can breed, the Goldfish breeder enjoys Goldfish and so breeds the kind of fish that he enjoys, namely Goldfish.[31] Similarly with God, for it seems that God enjoys humans. It just so happens that humans are of the sort of creature that have the freedom to act as they please and are limited in many respects and thus less excellent perhaps than many other possible beings. Further, Adams argues that it is not that humans are somehow inherently special; rather, it is that God *graciously* loves them. If this is the case then should God not be free to pour out His loving grace on such undeserving creatures? God's loving grace seems to be of extreme intrinsic value and so it seems to follow that God is free to express this kind of love towards His creation. Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder also argue that God is free to create less than the best

[29] Rowe(b), p. 151.

[30] Robert Merrihew Adams, "Must God Create the Best?" *The Philosophical Review* 18 (July 1972) pp. 317-332.

[31] Ibid., p. 329.

creatable world.[32] Contra both Rowe and Adams, the Howard-Snyders argue for God's freedom to create in a less-than-the-best world scenario. If there is no best creatable world, then God cannot create it and so is free to create any other creatable world (as long as it is a good world).[33]

J.A. Cover and Michael Bergmann offer an interesting view in which they deny God's freedom to create, yet argue that God is still "thankworthy" because God is still responsible for the act of creating and has created for the right reasons.[34] Edward Wierenga argues further that God's freedom cannot be understood in terms of human freedom; rather, when the theist argues for God's being free with respect to creation, she must mean something altogether different, perhaps a better or complete understanding of what it means for an agent to be free.[35] Very many others have written on the subject of divine freedom, so it almost goes without saying that the debate is alive and flourishing. With the ever-mounting literature on the subject (and against Rowe's account in particular) the Christian theist should take heart; however, some of these arguments cannot be correct (or, at any rate, stand by themselves). So how should the Christian theist best respond to Rowe? Perhaps a cumulative case will work best.

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[32] Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, p. 260-268.

[33] Rowe actually agrees with this; however, Rowe feels a less-than-best scenario poses many problems for the issues of God's moral unsurpassability. See below, chap. 3.

[34] Michael Bergmann and J.A. Cover, "Divine Responsibility Without Divine Freedom," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (October 2006), pp. 381-408.

[35] Edward Wierenga, "Perfect Goodness and Divine Freedom," *Philosophical Books* 48 (July 2007), pp. 207-216. More on this below (p. 16), but essentially, since human freedom is subject to all sorts of outside influences, causal conditions, etc., and God's freedom is only influenced by His own nature—that is, *Himself*—God is more truly and completely free than human agents.

II. Building a Case for God's Freedom

Before setting about the discussion of exactly which way (or ways) is best to respond to Rowe, it seems that there are key terms in the discussion that stand in need of some revision. Remember that what Rowe essentially affirms is:

> (M) Given God's essential divine attributes, if there is a best world that God can create then God *must* create that world.

If (M) is true and the actual world is a world that God created then the actual world is the best of all possibly created worlds. Moreover, if (M) is true, God *necessarily* created the actual world and so was not *free* in a significant way with respect to His creating it. But is (M) true? If it is, in what sense is it true? Suppose for a moment that (M) *is* true. If (M) is true, how can God be who the Christian theist claims He is if He lacks the divine freedom to create; and, why should He be worthy of anyone's praise? One answer may be that the term 'must' needs some refining.

Rowe suggests that since God's attributes make it such that God cannot fail *vis a vis* (M), then God is not free *vis a vis* (M) because for God to be truly free the following must be true: God was free to refrain from creating a world, and God was free to create any other world instead of the world He created.[36] But why must Rowe deny that God was free with respect to either of these postulates? It appears that Rowe denies God's freedom because He takes God's freedom to be similar to human freedom which is bound by time, space, and lack of omnipotence. It seems more plausible, however, to think that God's freedom should be defined somewhat differently. C.S. Lewis states the case this way:

> Whatever human freedom means, Divine freedom cannot mean indeterminacy between alternatives and choice of one of them. Perfect goodness can never debate about the end to be obtained, and perfect wisdom cannot debate about the means suited to achieve it. The freedom of God consists in the fact that no cause other than Himself produces His

[36] Rowe(a), p. 406.

> acts and no external obstacle impedes them—that His own goodness is the root from which they all grow and His own omnipotence the air in which they all flower.[37]

It seems that it may even be prudent to suggest that what compatibilists say about *human* freedom may be applicable to God's actions.[38] Essentially what a compatibilist says about *human* free action is that if given the right antecedent or logically sufficient conditions for the performing of some action (maybe the agent so acting is unknowingly under the influence of drugs, say), they are compatible with that action's being performed freely.[39] So, though the presence of these certain causes seem to be incompatible with the action's being performed freely, the actions themselves are in some sense done freely by the agent. Though incompatibilism may fail with respect to *human* free action, it does not fall to the same problems with respect to God's action. It seems God's freedom should be thought of in a different light than human freedom.

Rowe objects to this, however. He says that he agrees with Lewis's assessment but that Lewis should have added "that God could not have refrained from performing an action, should the action be required by his perfect goodness."[40] By Rowe's lights, to refrain from performing some action that God's divine attributes require of Him means that He does not possess those divine attributes. What is more, since God cannot do other than His divine attributes require of Him, He does that action of necessity and therefore cannot have done so freely.[41] But it seems that this misses Lewis's point. Rowe attributes necessity to God as he would to a human *vis a vis*

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[37] C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), pp. 26-27.

[38] Wierenga, p. 209.

[39] Ibid.

[40] William L. Rowe, "Replies," *Philosophical Books* 48 (July 2007), p. 219.

[41] Ibid.

His ability to act freely; this is exactly what Lewis was speaking *against*. God's possessing certain necessary divine attributes preclude Him from doing other than His divine attributes can allow. Put another way, God cannot allow *Himself* to do other than His nature requires of Him. Humans have nothing like this; humans are influenced by *outside agents* of various kinds with respect to their actions. As Rowe notes, God has no outside influences, and I agree;[42] however, God is *his own* influence which Rowe, I think, misses. Norman Kretzmann puts it this way: "Sources altogether internal to an agent who is, as God is, altogether invulnerable to passions pose no threat to the agent's autonomy."[43] It is God's own attributes that cause Him to act a certain way (viz., perfectly) so it seems as though God can be said to be freely acting in accord with Himself. If this is the case, it can be said that God is free with respect to His necessarily creating the best (if there is a best).

'Must' then appears to mean something different from how Rowe takes it. If a freely acting *human* agent 'must' do something then that may or may not mean that the freely acting human agent is acting against her will. In other words, when the human agent 'must' do something, she does it whether or not *she wishes* to do it. This cannot be the case with God, however. If God 'must' do something, it is only because He wills to do something, and He only wills something if He wishes to will something. This is not to say that God wills *everything* He wishes,[44] for some things He wants may be of lesser value than other things he wants. For

[42] Ibid.

[43] Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation," in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1991), p. 211. Kretzmann does go on to say, however—and I think this favors Rowe's argument—that "goodness does require things other than itself as a manifestation of itself, that God therefore necessarily though altogether willingly wills the being of something other than himself, and that the free choice involved in creation is confined to the selection of possibilities to actualize for the purpose of manifestation." p. 223.

example, it may be that God wishes that all men would follow and love Him, yet His wanting His creation to *freely* love Him might trump His want for their simply loving Him (no matter if it is freely done so or not). So, if it is the case that God wills what He wishes (though, not *all* that He wishes), and wishes what He wills, then God wills what He wishes to will.[45] If this is true (and it certainly seems as though it is) then God truly is free.

That is all well and good if God does in fact create the best creatable world. But, what if there is a best creatable world and God creates a world other than it? Is God free to do that? The answer seems to very much depend on what the purpose of world creation is. If one takes it that God must create a paradise because anything else is less 'good', then perhaps God cannot but create the best in that sense. But what if, following Robert Adams, God has another purpose in mind when He creates a world? What if God chooses to create a world (and in particular, its inhabitants) that is less than stellar? Why is God not free to create a world that allows Him to exercise His loving grace on created beings that He loves for no other reason than that He loves them?[46] Suppose the following example given by Adams:

> Case (C): Suppose it has been discovered that if intending parents take a certain drug before conceiving a child, they will have a child whose abnormal genetic constitution will give it vastly superhuman intelligence and superior prospects of happiness. Other things

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[44] For example, 2 Tim. 2:4 "[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." From a decidedly Reformed perspective, if God willed all that He wished (i.e. desired) then all men would be saved or, put another way, God would have willed that all men would be saved.

[45] I take it that Leibniz was of a similar opinion when he said, "I know that some persons, in speaking of the antecedent and consequent will of God, have meant by the antecedent that which wills that all men be saved, and by the consequent that which wills, in consequence of persistent sin, that there be some damned, damnation being a result of sin. But these are only examples of a more general notion, and one may say with the same reason, that God wills by his antecedent will that men sin not, and that by his consequent or final and decretory will (which is always followed by its effect) he wills to permit that they sin, this permission being a result of superior reasons." Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "The Argument Reduced to Syllogistic Form," from *Theodicy* translated by E.M. Huggard, edited with an introduction by Austin Farrer. Reprinted by permission of Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. In *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings,* 3rd ed. William L. Rowe and William J. Wainwright (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 1998), p. 220.

[46] Adams, pp. 323-325.

> being equal, would it be wrong for intending parents to have normal children instead of taking the drug?[47]

What if God considered something like Case (C) before he made human beings? Set aside for the moment whether or not God was *wrong* to create humans.[48] Instead, given God's essential attributes, would His being perfect have allowed Him to create creatures that are less than the best? In other words, would God have been free to create humans if they are less than the best species-type that God can create? It certainly does not seem like this would be a problem. Similar to the Goldfish breeder supposed by Adams, it seems that God is free to create just any *type* of being He so wishes, whether or not that type of being is the most excellent type God could have created. Furthermore, does it not follow that if God's will is perfect, that His willing of any creature (of whatever type) is also perfect? Because God's will is perfect it does not follow that the things God wills must also be perfect in and of themselves. It might be, rather, that the sum of the parts of God's creation (the *organic whole*, to borrow a term from G.E. Moore[49]) is perfect. In any case, God's freedom seems to be intact.

The case is made even worse for Rowe if one considers that God's status as a necessary being entails that any world at which God exists (which is all possible worlds if God exists at any possible world) thus contains his unlimited perfections. If this is the case, then any world in which God exists is of unlimited value and so it seems plausible that *all* possible worlds are very good (and in some sense—since all possible worlds are of unlimited value—are tied for the best).[50] What this means is that there could be very many possible creatable worlds that, by the

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[47] Ibid., 329.

[48] This is an important issue that I address in the next chapter.

[49] G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 187ff.

[50] Alvin Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'," pgs. 8-9.

very fact that God exists in them, are eligible for creation. If that is the case, then God would certainly be free—in *any* respect—to pick whichever of those worlds to create. Now, Rowe sees this coming. He objects that if this is the type of freedom God has, then He has a kind of freedom that only occurs when it does not matter what He does.[51] But why should that count against God's freedom?[52] If many (perhaps infinitely many) worlds are tied for the best (at least in some sense), why should it not matter which world God chooses to create? It seems it would *at least* matter to the creatures who exist in the world God chose to create. And for good reason; if God had chosen to create some other world, the creatures in the world God *did* create might not exist (if for no other reason than God could have created a world in which none of the creatures from the actual world exist). Perhaps all possible creatable worlds and creatures are such that, since they are not God, they do not *deserve* God's having or choosing to create them. This would mean that for whatever world God chose to create, He did so out of His graciousness. It certainly seems as though if this is true (and it is at least *plausibly* true), then God's creative actions are well worthy of the praise and thankfulness of God's created beings.[53]

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[51] Rowe(b), p. 166.

[52] Also, consider Norman Kretzmann's interesting thesis that perhaps the actual world is a bit like a photostat, a practically perfect representation of a type-written page. He puts it this way: "Suppose, then, that the actual world considered as a representation of God is as good as possible in the sense that any world better than this one in terms of improved precision of representation would be no better at all in its capacity to represent God to any possible created percipient. That is, suppose that the limitations essential to created intelligence are such that the actual world is as good a representation of God as there could be for created intelligences. Then it would be *irrational* for God to choose to create any world theoretically better than this one, and to act irrationally is not only out of the question for God, it is also *incompatible* with any full-fledged instance of free choice." Norman Kretzmann, "A Particular Problem of Creation," in *Being and Goodness*, p. 239. Emphasis mine.

[53] Says Leibniz: "A will to which it is natural to choose well *deserves most* to be commended…" from *The Argument Reduced to Syllogistic Form*, p. 224. Emphasis mine.

III. A Biblical Account of Freedom

Since this is a defense of the freedom of the God of specifically Christian theism, it seems prudent to investigate a possible biblical account of the freedom of God. In the Christian world-view, unless a man has been saved by God and is undergoing the process of justification he is incapable of doing anything truly righteous; that is, he is incapable of not sinning, he is *non posse non peccari*. To wit, Romans 3:10-12 states:

> [A]s it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."

Further still, Isaiah 64:6 reads, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." Romans 6 indicates that men are *slaves to sin*; however it goes on to state that men can be *made free* from their enslavement to sin. Through the redemptive process of salvation granted to man by God, man becomes free *not* to sin; he becomes *posse non peccari*. Moreover, the end result of the sanctification processes, the redemptive process, is that in the eschaton man will *no longer be able* to sin. Would Rowe suppose that this is somehow a lack of freedom on the part of the redeemed man? The Bible portrays this as the *ultimate* in freedom; man is freed by the redemptive process to *always* follow after God.[54] What does this have to do with God's freedom, Rowe might ask? From a Christian perspective the answer should seem rather obvious. If the redemptive process is the process whereby God perfects man and molds him more into the form of Christ (i.e. to be the perfect representation of the *imago Dei*), then to be made *non posse peccari* is to be made more like God, being a clearer representation of God. If that is the case, and freedom from the 'ability' to

[54] Leibniz states something similar when he says "Rather it is true freedom, and the most perfect, to be able to make the best use of one's free will, and always to exercise this power, without being turned aside either by outward forces or by inward passions, whereof the one enslaves our bodies and the other our souls. There is nothing less servile and more befitting the highest degree of freedom than to be always led towards the good, and always by one's own inclination, without any constraint and without any displeasure." Ibid., p. 223.

sin is true freedom, then it seems God's necessarily acting perfectly is the ultimate in freedom. God by his nature is *non posse peccari*. Since this is the case, it appears that God is *more* free than those who can do otherwise than perfectly, for those that can do otherwise are bonded to sin (or, at the very least, have yet to be fully freed from that bondage).

IV. Conclusions

I have argued in this chapter that if God's actions are, in some way, causally determined, then it is God's own divine attributes that causally determine them. If this is the case, it seems to me, given what we have said, that He is still free *vis a vis* those actions. Rowe disagrees with this for he finds the following to be false: if X (a rational person) necessarily has property Y, and X's having a property Y entails that X performs action A, then, barring other considerations, X is *free* in performing A. He believes that this principle is contrary to libertarian freedom, which may be correct;[55] yet, I have also argued that it is not necessarily the case that God's divine attributes require that He perform one *particular or token* action. Rather, if it is true that there are very many possible worlds that are tied for the best (in some sense), then God's being free to create any of those worlds implies His being free in a significant—and, perhaps, libertarian—way. However, the point is that the Christian theist is not arguing for libertarian freedom in the *human* sense with respect to God's actions; rather, she is arguing for God's being *perfectly* free. So, while I argue that God need not perform a particular or token action, He does necessarily perform any action He performs only *one way*, namely, perfectly (i.e. in a way consistent with an all powerful, omniscient, perfectly good being). This fact (if it is a fact), I take it, does not preclude any of God's actions from being free in a significant or libertarian way. In any case, whether or not God can *actually* do other than He does with respect to some actions

[55] Rowe(b), pp. 64-65.

does not appear to make much of an *ultima facie* difference. God's freedom should be studied through the understanding that God can only act in ways consistent with the attributes that He has; the same can be said for any being. Further still, perhaps similar to the concept of God's omnipotence, the conditions regarding God's divine freedom need to be redefined.

Overall it seems that the disconnect between Rowe and the Christian theist is one of a metaphysical nature. Rowe holds that to define God's necessarily choosing to do what is best as *perfect* freedom "is a colossal misuse of language."[56] The problem is that the Christian defines *perfect* freedom as that which God exemplifies whereas Rowe defines *perfect* (I take it, at any rate) freedom as an agent's ability to perform or refrain from performing some morally significant action A. While Rowe is certainly correct when it comes to a human's *limited* ability to be free, for the Christian theist, it appears Rowe is, perhaps, misguided when it comes to the *ideal* of what it means to be free. He argues himself that "this particular problem of perfection and freedom can be solved only by ascribing to God a different sort of freedom. That is, a freedom to do what is good that does not include the freedom to do what is bad or the freedom to do less good than one can."[57] So, while it is true that God is not free to do badly—for that is not *perfect* freedom, it is a form of enslavement—we have seen, that God *is* free to create a less-than-best world on a Rowean account. The Christian's answer to Rowe's charge then is this: God's true freedom is found not in the ability to do other than He does,[58] but in the fact that He can do no other than to bring glory and honor to Himself—whether or not God creates the best.

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[56] Ibid., p. 65.

[57] Ibid., p. 3.

[58] Even though God *can* do other than He does. He simply cannot do other than He does in a less-than-perfect way (i.e. a way inconsistent with His nature and divine attributes).

CHAPTER THREE

Is God Morally Culpable if He Creates a World That is Less Than the Best?

Rowe argues that in a no-best-world scenario, it is possible that for any world God creates, He could have created a better or at least *someone* could have created a better. Rowe's argument against God's moral unsurpassability then, rests on what he calls "Principle B". It goes like this:

> B. If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it.[59]

By Rowe's lights it should strike a person that B is not only plausible but also self-evident since "if an omniscient being creates a world when it could have created a better world, then that being has done something less good than it could do (create a better world). But any being that knowingly does something (all things considered) less good than it could do falls short of being the best possible being."[60]

Certainly B is plausible (at least on a *prima facie* basis), but is it self-evident? Not obviously. Why should the end result of a freely acting moral agent's creative output be considered as a barometer for the moral goodness of said agent? Is it not possible for an unsurpassable being to create a surpassable world? What about if the end-result of the creative action is not up to the creative being? In a well-known article entitled "How an Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World," Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder set about to show

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[59] Rowe(b), 91.

[60] Ibid., 89.

that an unsurpassable being *can* possibly create a surpassable world.[61] In the article, the Howard-Snyders suppose the existence of three god-like beings (meaning they are omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, etc.) named Jove, Juno, and Thor, who set about the task of world-creating. The first god to create a world is Jove who goes about his task of creating a world by inventing a machine that chooses, at random, some world to create from the infinite number of possible worlds that are available for Jove's creation. Jove pushes the button for the machine to start up, and it just so happens that out of the infinite number of worlds to create, the machine lands on world 777 and so Jove creates world 777. Juno, going second, uses the same technique as Jove, but the machine lands on world 999 this time and so Juno creates world 999. Thor, though, does something different. He sees that 777 is not quite a good enough world to create and so he creates world 888, not willing to settle for anything less than world 800 or better. In the scenario, it is rather obvious that Juno is not morally better than Jove, but what about Thor? While the Howard-Snyders think that since *Juno* is not better than Jove, they also think that *Thor* cannot be better than Jove. Their argument is based on Juno's having created a better world than both Thor *and* Jove. If Juno created a world that is better than both Thor and Jove, yet is not morally better than Jove since her randomizer landed on 999 by dumb luck, then it cannot be that *Thor* is better than Jove either. But Rowe thinks differently; he thinks that the moral goodness of Thor and Juno can be judged on their *reasons* for creating the worlds that they did.[62] Says Rowe:

> If such a being (their Juno), given her degree of goodness, judges as acceptable for creation the *same* worlds as Jove, then the fact that her randomizer selects #999 for creation gives us no reason at all to think Juno is a better being than Jove, even though she ends up creating a better world than Jove does. But if, like Thor, the being's degree

[61] Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, "How an Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (April 1994), pp. 260-268.

[62] Rowe(a), p. 416.

> of goodness is such that he judges that worlds of lesser value than #800 are unacceptable candidates for creation, then the fact that its randomizer selects world #800 or higher gives us reason to think that Thor is a better being than Jove.[63]

The problem for Rowe, however, is that perhaps he is making too much of Jove's finding worlds less than #800 acceptable when more should be made of Thor's not thinking to create a better world than *he* did.[64] Considering that Jove had an infinite number of possible worlds that his randomizing machine could have landed on, it was highly improbable that a number less than #800 would occur; in fact, that is true for just any number in an infinite set.[65] So really, Jove was rather unfortunate to have his randomizer land on 777 as the odds of landing on a much more valuable world was almost certain. But Thor did not use a randomizing machine; he simply decided to pick world 888. So what is to be made of this decision by Thor? Jesse Steinberg believes that Thor has succeeded in excluding from his options for creation, those worlds that are *minimally acceptable*.[66] By this he just means that worlds 1 through 700, say, are the least desirable worlds that God could choose to create. They may be acceptable, but only minimally so.[67] However, Jeremy Gwiazda argues differently. He puts it this way: "It is true that Thor will not settle for a world less than 888; however, Thor *will not strive for* a world greater than

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[63] Ibid. It is being assumed here that it is even possible for their to exist (1) a morally perfect being who would use a randomizing device and, (2) that it is possible for an omniscient being to somehow not be able to predict the outcome of his/her randomizing device. These difficulties aside, I think the illustration is a useful analog.

[64] Jeremy Gwiazda, "Remarks on Jove and Thor," *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (January 2008), pp. 81.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Jesse R. Steinberg, "Leibniz, Creation and the Best of All Possible Worlds," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 62 (2007), p. 128.

[67] Rowe, I think, argues similarly. But I think such an objection is wrong-headed. Just what does it mean for a world (*any* world) to be *minimally* acceptable in a series of infinite possible worlds? W1 is just as 'deficient' as W80001 when compared with W∞. By this I just mean that W80001 is just as infinitely 'deficient' to W∞ as W1 is. Moreover, as we have seen (above p. 19), and shall see below (chapter four), if God exists at all possible worlds, then really all worlds are maximally acceptable for creation. This is not to say that there are not worlds that are better than others (see chapter four); however, it is to say that there are no *minimally* acceptable worlds; they are all of a maximal acceptability.

888."[68] The end result then is that the chances of Thor creating a world greater than 888 is zero, whilst the chances of Jove creating a world greater than 888 (prior to his activating the randomizer) is almost guaranteed, it just so happens that it does not turn out the way perhaps Jove might have thought it would. But why should that count against Jove's moral goodness? It does not seem that it does. It seems then that Jove is actually morally *superior* to Thor in that the chances of a world higher than 888 being created is much higher given Jove's world-creating strategy than given Thor's. Of course, this does not prove that Jove is morally unsurpassable; rather, it simply raises an important objection to Rowe, viz., that the end result of God's creating a world may not be up to Him and so it may be the case that the end result of God's creative actions should not count against His moral goodness.

As noted above, with respect to God creating the best creatable world, Rowe argues that if there is a best world to create, God must necessarily create it because if He does not then there is another possible being that might possibly create a better world, thereby showing that God is not morally unsurpassable. It has been discussed already, however, that Rowe takes it that there *is* no such best creatable world and since this is the case then God is stuck in a quandary: for any world He creates there is always a better world He could have created (and so some other possible being can create a better world, thereby surpassing God in moral goodness). For Rowe, it is logically *impossible* for God to create the best. It follows then that it is logically impossible for God to do the best He can.

If it is logically impossible for God to create a best creatable world, then of course His not creating the best cannot count against His moral goodness. Rowe, rightly, agrees with this.[69] The problem is revealed, however, when one considers whether or not it should count against

[68] Gwiazda, p. 81. Emphasis mine.

[69] Rowe(b), 101.

God's goodness if He creates world W700 (out of an infinite set of worlds) rather than W701 or greater (out of an infinite set of worlds). At first blush it certainly seems like God's being morally culpable for creating a world less good than He could have is an inescapable accusation; for, whatever world God creates it will always be the same story: He could have created a better world. But such harsh expectations hardly seem a fair standard to hold anyone to, even God. William Wainwright states it this way: "an accusation which is always in place is never in place. An agent can't be blamed for a fault to which it would be exposed no matter how it acted."[70] Thomas V. Morris argues similarly when he says:

> If you and I do less well than we're capable of doing, then those around us may conclude, and may sometimes justifiably conclude, that we are not at the level of goodness that could be exemplified. But failing to do the best you can is a flaw or manifests an incompleteness in moral character in this way only if doing the best you can is at least a logical possibility. If doing the best he can in creating a world is for God an impossibility, given the range of omnipotence and the nature of those considerations making the notion of a best of all possible worlds an incoherence, then not doing his best in creating cannot be seen as a flaw or as manifesting an incompleteness in the character of God.[71]

Rowe agrees with both Wainwright and Morris;[72] however, he argues that he is not blaming God for creating *some world or other* than which there is a better—for that "general fault" is unavoidable.[73] What *is* avoidable, says Rowe, is the "particular fault" of God's creating W700 when He could have just as easily created W701 or better. There are three important distinctions

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[70] William J. Wainwright, "Rowe on God's Freedom and God's Grace," *Philo* 8 (Spring-Summer 2005), p. 12.

[71] Thomas V. Morris, "Perfection and Creation," in *Reasoned Faith*, ed. Eleanore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 244.

[72] And Kretzmann, as well. For, Kretzmann argues that "if it would be a violation of the principle of noncontradiction for God to create a world better than any other world he could create, then *a fortiori* that logical truth which does not diminish his power also leaves his *goodness* undiminished." This is from "A Particular Problem of Creation," in *Being and Goodness*, p. 238.

[73] Rowe(b), 110.

that need to be made when considering the *general fault* and the *particular fault*, thinks Rowe, namely:

> (a) Failing to do the best one can is a defect only if doing the best one can is possible for one to do.
>
> (b) Failing to do better than one did is a defect only if doing better than one did is possible for one to do.

and

> (c) Failing to do better than one did is a defect only if doing the best one can is possible for one to do.[74]

Rowe takes it that (a) and (b) are obviously true, whilst (c) is false. And it is (c), thinks Rowe, that the theist needs to establish in order to show that God is not culpable for His creating a world when He could have created a better.[75] So the theist is stuck with having to battle against (b)'s seemingly being true;[76] how might the theist best respond? Before answering this question, it is important to see whether or not there is a particular standard that Rowe is justified in assuming God is beholden to with respect to His creating a world. Put another way, the discussion now turns to the issue of whether or not there is some particular world-creating ethic God must abide by as He creates a world.

I. Is There a World-Creating Ethic?

Before discussing how best to block Rowe's arguments or refute his claims against God's moral supremacy, it is important to analyze just what it is that Rowe seems to be claiming. Rowe claims that God must do the best He can (if He can) or else He is doing something that is

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[74] Ibid., 102.

[75] Ibid.

[76] As noted, Rowe takes it that (a) is true as well; however, Rowe does not fault God *vis a vis* (a) in a no-best-world scenario, so the theist just has to battle against (b).

akin to an immoral action. For Rowe, *this* world cannot possibly be the best world God could have created (who cannot imagine a better world?) so it must be the case, if God exists, that there is a better world that God could have created.[77] What is more, Rowe holds that there is an infinite set of increasingly better possible worlds, any of which God was free to create. But wait, if that is true, then God is cornered; every world God decides to create is going to be worse off than some other world. For any world God creates, He could have created a better.

If this is in fact the case, then by Rowe's lights, it cannot be the case that God exists because God always does the best He can (whether He can create a *best* or not), and in a no-best-world scenario God can always do better than He did. Remember though that Rowe does not hold God accountable to the *general fault* (as noted above) whereby God cannot help but create some world or other than which there is a better; rather he is holding God accountable for having created *this* particular world (or *any* particular world) rather than another that is better. Rowe holds God accountable to the *particular fault* and not the *general fault*. But what exactly is Rowe asking God to do? What does he mean by a 'best' world (or a *better* world)? And what does he mean when he argues that God *ought* to do 'better' than He did?

Though Rowe does not explicitly say so, it appears that his use of the term 'best' refers to some world or other that is in some sense better than the actual world. Taking Rowe to mean a *best* creatable world in a materialistic sense or maybe a moralistic sense then it is rather obvious why he believes there is no best world: for any possible good one can think of to inhabit the world, there could always be one more (e.g. one more morally good person, one more palm tree, etc.). Initially then it seems Rowe's claim may have some teeth since God cannot create the best creatable world (for whichever world He chooses to create there will always exist the possibility

[77] Rowe(b), p. 21 n. 21. Rowe states that "the idea that the world we live in is the best possible world seems an absurd idea…"

of a better one), and so it follows that there may possibly exist a being who can create a world better than the world God creates and thereby be a morally better being. For Rowe, God is susceptible to (b), the particular fault of not having done better than He did when it was possible for Him to do better. But if God creates one of the worlds in an infinite series, is there really the possibility of another being creating a better world than God created and thereby being morally superior to God? If not, then it seems that (b) is questionable at best, for if it is not possible for another being to create a better world than God (even in a no-best-world scenario), then it is not possible for God to create a better world than He did. Instead of wondering, for the moment, whether or not another being could *actually* exist who could create a better world than God (because it is the mere *possibility* of such a being that causes problems for Rowe), it is prudent to examine whether or not there is another possible world that can be *created* whether there exists another creator-being than God or not. To answer this question, Edward Wierenga poses a certain scenario:

> Consider a world *W* and the largest state of affairs included in *W* that God strongly actualizes [or 'creates' as has been the term used in this paper] in *W*, namely, *T(W)*…there is another world, *W'*, such that the largest state of affairs that God strongly actualizes in *W'* is also *T(W)*. Then if God strongly actualizes *T(W)*, whether it's *W* that is actual or it's *W'* will depend on which of the following [contingent premises] is true:
>
> (i) If God were to strongly actualize *T(W)* then *W* would be actual, or
> (ii) If God were to strongly actualize *T(W)* then *W'* would be actual.[78]

Further, suppose that *W* is what Rowe might call a 'good' world. It includes just about anything that he can imagine when considering what he might call a 'good' world. Also suppose that *W'* is what Rowe might call a 'good' world; in fact, he might call it a 'better' world than *W* because, while it includes everything included in *W*, it also includes his having a brand new Corvette (or

[78] Edward Wierenga, "Perfect Goodness and Divine Freedom," *Philosophical Books* 48 (July 2007), p. 213. My insertions. Here again, we can see the implications of God's creating a world with libertarianly free-willed creatures and the world that gets strongly actualized.

some other such luxury item if Rowe is so inclined) thereby making *W'* at least slightly better on Rowe's account than *W*. Now suppose that God actualizes *T(W)*; only one of the two possible worlds (given His strongly actualizing *T(W)*) can be created by God, so which is it? Well, it is the one that is *actual*—whichever one obtains. Say *W* obtains and not *W'*; is *W'* even possible for another being to create? It appears not since God actualized *T(W)* and *W* is the world that obtained and *W'* is not.[79] It is at least plausible, then, that if God actualizes *T(W)* and *W* is created, *it was not* within God's power to actualize a better world; He could *not* have done better than He did. If this is true, then (b) is undercut. But wait, Principle B is undergirded by (b), so if (b) is undercut then so is Principle B. God's goodness, then, does not seem to be threatened with not being unsurpassable.

What is more, it is not at all clear to me that the "particular fault" can avoid developing—or collapsing into—the "general fault." If for any world God creates He could have created a better, would he not always be susceptible to having created world x, say, when He should have created world x+1 (and so on *ad infinitum*)? Again, "an accusation [i.e. that God should have created world x+1 instead of world x] which is always in place is *never* in place."[80]

A more obvious rejoinder to Rowe from the Christian perspective (or maybe any theist for that matter) might be that God's goodness may need to be redefined, as it were, in a similar fashion to His omnipotence, say. When faced with the question "if God is omnipotent, could he create a rock so big he cannot lift it?" the typical theistic response is something like, "that is not what I mean by 'omnipotence'." Cannot the same argument apply to God's goodness? When Rowe says that since God is unsurpassably good and therefore He should be able to create the best possible creatable world but cannot, so He is not, cannot the Christian respond, "but that is

[79] Wierenga considers a similar case in his article, p. 214.

[80] Wainwright, p. 12. My insertion and emphasis.

not what I mean by 'goodness'?"[81] The Christian does not intend to ascribe to God powers that are beyond Him, namely, the power to avoid the *general fault* and the *particular fault*. Since God cannot avoid either of these so-called faults, then it is not within God's power to do so. And the Christian theist does not intend to ascribe to God powers that are not logically possible to have.

Furthermore, it may be that Rowe is holding God's 'goodness' to be a sort of goodness as defined in some sort of virtue ethic; 'goodness' meaning 'virtuous'. If this is the case, then it is not much of a wonder as to why Rowe might think that God's virtue is deficient, perhaps, in some way. God's allowing certain (seemingly) gratuitous evils, and the copious amounts of evils He does seem to show that God is lacking in virtue. A virtuous being would do all she can to stop such (seemingly) gratuitous evils and would eliminate as much evil as she could, would she not? Thanks to Wierenga's example, it has already been shown that these sorts of outcomes of world-creation may not be up to God; however, even if they were, the Christian theist does not mean to define God's 'goodness' in terms of virtue. Rather, the Christian defines God's 'goodness' in terms of righteousness; that is, that which brings the most glory to God. Since the Christian believes that God has revealed His ultimate purposes through the means of Holy Scripture, it seems Rowe's opinions on this matter come up less than adequate as an attack against God's goodness and moral unsurpassability.

Still, it is not at all clear that there *is* some particular world-creating ethic to which God is beholden. Perhaps Rowe wishes to argue that (b) is an overall ethic and so it also encompasses God's world-creating as well as any other action He so chooses; however, it looks as if (b) is flimsy at best and so provides no strong reason for accepting its standard nor does it provide a reason to accept Rowe's main argument, Principle B. What is more, from a Divine Command

[81] Ibid.

Theorist perspective, ethics have their ontological grounding in the *very nature* of God. Presumably, this includes world-creating ethics. So if God defines ethics by His nature, again what room is there for Rowe's input? Not much, it seems; remember that from a Christian view of things, it seems not only possible but highly plausible that the one ethic by which God might create a world (or do anything for that matter) is that whatever He does must rebound, redound, and resound to His glory. Put another way, the Christian holds that what God defines as 'good' is that which has as its τελος the maximal glorification of God. What sort of world might do that? It is at least plausible that it would have to be a world that could display God's attributes (be it His basic or essential attributes, though not necessarily all of them) in some sort of harmonious way. The world that God creates would probably not only display His power and majesty, but also His creativity, His love, and more to the point His *grace*.

II. Does the Actual World Meet the World-Creating Ethic?

Rowe, of course, would answer the question, Does the actual world meet the world-creating ethic?, with a resounding, "No." He holds that God is to be held morally culpable for His creative actions because for any world He creates, He could have created a better. In other words, God falls prey to (b). It has been shown, however, that this is not obviously the case. In fact, the Christian has good reason to think that it is less than plausibly the case. There are hurdles for the Christian to leap, however, even with respect to an issue we addressed earlier (above, pg. 18): God's choosing to create humans rather than some more excellent creature. This should harken the reader back to a familiar atheistic foe: David Hume. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* he gives his 'third circumstance':

> The human species, whose chief excellence is reason and sagacity, is of all others the most necessitous, and the most deficient in bodily advantages; without clothes, without arms, without food, without lodging, without any convenience of life, except what they

> owe to their own skill and industry. In short, nature seems to have formed an exact calculation of the necessities of her creatures; and, like a *ridged master*, has afforded them little more powers or endowments than what are strictly sufficient to supple those necessities. An *indulgent parent* would have bestowed a large stock in order to guard against accidents, and secure happiness and welfare of the creature in the most unfortunate concurrence of circumstances. Every course of life would not have been so surrounded with precipices that the least departure from the true path, by mistake or necessity, must involve us in misery and ruin.[82]

Rowe seems to piggyback on Hume here when he says, "in creating human creatures it is God himself who establishes what the norm of human happiness will be. *There is no already existing norm* from which God may choose to deviate either by creating beings who are subhuman or superhuman in the way of intelligence and prospects of happiness."[83] What exactly are Hume and Rowe saying here? Apparently they take it that the species *human being* has no preset way of existing, or put another way, no prerequisite deficiencies or strengths. The human species was a blank-slate, so to speak, before God decided how to make it. There does not appear to be anything *obviously* wrong with this line of thinking, but what if a species is more like a possible world? In other words, what if it is not that God *created* the human species, but rather *actualized* the human species?[84]

Now, it might be objected that what God does not create, in the possible-worlds sense, are states of affairs and that God *does* create the "heavens and the earth and all they contain."[85] That certainly *seems* right. But what about the state of affairs *human beings necessarily have strengths x, y, and z and deficiencies l, m, and n* (where the strengths x, y, and z are the strengths

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[82] Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 71. Emphasis in the original.

[83] Rowe(b), 81. Emphasis mine.

[84] By way of reminder, it is not that God creates a world in the strict sense; rather, following Plantinga, God *actualizes* a possible world. For God to create something in the strict sense there would have to be a time when that thing God creates did not exist. This is not true for possible worlds, for possible worlds are just maximal sets of states of affairs, and God does not create states of affairs; He actualizes them. See Plantinga's *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 38-39.

[85] Ibid., 38.

human beings have in the actual world; similarly for the deficiencies l, m, and n)? This state of affairs is at least possible, and for all that either Rowe or Hume knows, it is *actual.* It is possible then that there is no other way that humans could have been. If the state of affairs *human beings necessarily have strengths x, y, and z and deficiencies l, m, and n* turns out to not only be possible but actual, then God did not *create* that state of affairs, He actualized it. This would mean that if God had actualized some other state of affairs, it would have to be in His creating some other species besides humans. Rowe's addendum to Hume's already-existing complaint against God's morality would be undercut if what has been said is true. It might be that God did not have any choice in how limited humans were going to be if He chose to create them.

This may be a bit far-reaching though, so suppose it is wrong (and it may be that it is), suppose that God *could have* created human beings some other way than He did (if He did) and it would still be the human species. Or even if it is not wrong, suppose that God could have created another species that is more excellent than the human species. If either of these is the case (and it certainly seems as though at least one of them is), then there is still Hume's original objection to deal with, viz., that God is morally deficient for having created a less excellent being than He could have. Now, it may be the case that possible beings are similar to possible worlds in that for any being God creates He could have created a better. If this is the case, it would be easy to fall right back into the discussion of God's having to be held accountable to the *general fault* or the *particular fault*. However, the discussion need not go as far as all that. Why should not God be allowed to create a less than the most excellent species (assuming there is one)? Is God morally deficient in some way for not having created the best species? Perhaps God's purposes in creating a world (and in particular, its inhabitants) are such that the world He creates must allow Him to exercise His loving grace on created beings for no other reason than that He

loves them.[86] If this is the case, then it seems that the actual world *does* meet the standards for any world-creating ethic God might have. But *is* this the case? Given who God is, is He able to create a world (and so its inhabitants) that is less good than the best He could have done? It is to this important issue that the discussion now turns.

III. Is There Room for God's Grace?

For Rowe, "it remains difficult to see how God would be justified in creating creatures whose prospects for a good life are known by him to be mediocre in comparison with other creatures of the same species whose prospects for a good life are known by him to be much greater—given that this knowledge is all that is relevant to God's decision about which creatures to create."[87] Rowe is assuming here, of course, that it was possible for God to create humans some other way than He did (if He did); a point that is not altogether clear. That fact notwithstanding, even if it was possible for humans to be made more excellent than they were, is God morally deficient for having created them the way He did? Intuitively, one would assume that God could not just haul off and create beings to experience misery and pain (as humans do) and limited joys for *no good reason*. If this is indeed the human condition, what possible reason could God have had for creating humans as such?

Robert Adams and William Wainwright both suppose that any world God creates would likely have to be a world in which God would be able to show His gracious love for His creatures.[88] Again, in his important work, "Must God Create the Best?," Adams defends God's

[86] Robert Merrihew Adams, "Must God Create the Best?" pp. 323-325.

[87] Rowe(b), 81.

[88] Adams argument can be found in his "Must God Create the Best?" pp. 317-332 and Wainwright's can be found here: "Rowe on God's Freedom and God's Grace," *Philo* 8 (Spring-Summer 2005), pp. 12-22.

moral goodness whilst creating less than the best species-type of creatures. Consider again, his Case (C):

> Case (C): Suppose it has been discovered that if intending parents take a certain drug before conceiving a child, they will have a child whose abnormal genetic constitution will give it vastly superhuman intelligence and superior prospects of happiness. Other things being equal, would it be wrong for intending parents to have normal children instead of taking the drug?[89]

It is to be taken that Rowe would not find fault with the parents in Case (C). In applying this case to God's creation of humans, it seems as though what Rowe really means is that it is wrong for God to knowingly and voluntarily bring about beings that are notably deficient when compared with other beings of the same kind. It is not clear, though, that there *are* more excellent types of human beings. Why should it be that God was required to make humans more powerful or knowledgeable, or something else above what seems to be normal amongst humans? First, it may not be that the human species, as such, can be more powerful or knowledgeable, etc. than what appears to be normal. Second, even if there possibly exists some better-than-normal type of human, it does not follow that God should have created that type over the type (that is, the type of human in the actual world) He did. Again, if Rowe simply means that it is wrong for God to knowingly and voluntarily bring about beings that are *notably deficient* when compared with other beings of the same kind, then no fault can be found in God's creating humans as such.

The argument does not get any stronger for Rowe, however, even if he argues that God should have created some other more excellent (entirely different) species. If God is to be faulted for this then Rowe objects to his own existence. Could it not be a plausible claim to suggest that God in His grace decided to create a world where humans are the pinnacle of His

[89] Adams, 329.

creation on Earth, similar to a man who decides to raise Goldfish over some more beautiful or otherwise excellent fish?[90]

William Wainwright brings the point home even further. He aims to show that since God's gracious love is a great good, then it is possible that for God to be the morally best He can be, He must be able to create lesser good worlds.[91] Wainwright supposes the existence of two gods (both of whom are omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent), G1 and G2. Both G1 and G2 have an infinite array of worlds they can create and neither has a best world to create. They exist in a no-best-world scenario. While G1 is willing to settle for the creation of a world that is less good than W1, G2 is unwilling to settle for any world less good than W2. It would seem, by Rowe's lights, that G2 is the morally better being in this circumstance (remember His argument for Thor's moral supremacy over Jove) since he is unwilling to settle for such a low world as G1 is willing to settle for. But as Wainwright points out, this limits G2's ability to show his gracious love to certain worlds; namely, those worlds of lesser value than W2. But if a creator's gracious love is of high moral value then what does that say about G2? Wainwright says this:

> Because G2's standard is higher than G1's, the odds that its desire not to settle for a substandard world will trump its gratuitous love are greater. [And, in general,] the higher the standard an omnipotent, omniscient, and superlatively good being sets for itself the less scope it has for the exercise of gratuitous love. Second, the less worthy the vessel, the more splendid the grace. Yet views like Rowe's imply that an omnipotent, omniscient, and superlatively good being, G1, who creates (and bestows good lives upon) less worthy vessels because it gratuitously loves them may be morally inferior to an omnipotent, omniscient, and superlatively good being, G2, who, because it is unwilling to create worlds with as little objective value as G1 is willing to create, would *not* create those worlds *even if* it gratuitously loved (the persons in) them (and *even if* no world in which those persons exist is as good as W2). And this seems to imply that the production of objective value is a greater good than grace.[92]

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[90] This is the illustration that Adams uses in his article. Ibid., 329-330.

[91] Wainwright, 13-14.

[92] Ibid., 14. His insertions. Emphasis in the original.

The point then is that Rowe takes some other types of goods (perhaps material or moral) to be of greater value than God's gracious love. That is certainly a fine opinion for Rowe to have; however, it does not do much to affect the resolve of the Christian theist when defending God's goodness. The Christian takes it that God's gracious love is of *immeasurable* good, such that any world without it is so much the worse. Perhaps the greatest example of this is God's gracious condescension and loving sacrifice in the incarnation and atoning work of Christ.

Rowe understands this, though. He simply retorts that it is God's omni qualities that are central to the concept of the theistic God, not His gracious love.[93] That may be true for the theistic God in a restricted sense, but again, this is why it is important to make the distinction between the God of Western theism and the God of Christianity. They are not the same God. Rowe, for his part, is "inclined to think that a perfectly loving, gracious God would not need to have a world in which he has lots of opportunities to exhibit his grace, any more than good, loving parents would want to have children who often go wrong, just so they would have an opportunity to exhibit their forgiving love."[94] He does not give an argument for why he thinks this, however, so it does not end up amounting to much against the Christian theist's claim.

Because Rowe does not have much of an argument against the Christian's claim for God's gracious love as a reason to create a less-than-best world, he ends up agreeing that God may not be morally culpable in creating a less-than-best-world.[95] However, he argues instead of it being God's moral duty to create the best He can, perhaps His creating the best He can is a *supererogatory* act—one where He does the best He can do. This argument is hardly compelling. If God is not morally culpable for creating less-than-the-best, then He is still acting

[93] William Rowe, "Replies to Critics," *Philo* 8 (Spring-Summer 2005), p. 50.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Rowe(a), p. 410.

within His *perfect and unsurpassable goodness*. If this is the case, then God's goodness cannot get more perfect and unsurpassable than it already is. It seems as though if one considers the present world to be less than the best God could have created, it should be examined through the lense of God's acting in His grace.

IV. Conclusions

Now that a good deal of argumentation has been presented and Rowe's argument has been analyzed from various angles, does Rowe win the day? Is Rowe's Principle B as intuitive and self-evident as Rowe claims it is? It seems not. With the help of the Howard-Snyders, Edward Wierenga, Robert Adams, and others, it has been shown that not only is Principle B not self-evident, it may not even be *true*. While the Howard-Snyders' argument may not win the day outright, they have at least shown that it surely is *plausible* that an unsurpassable being can create a surpassable world. But then, as Wierenga and others claim, it may not even be up to God whether or not the world He creates turns out to be a good enough world to satisfy Rowe's demand. Moreover, it may simply be that Rowe's definition of 'good', or 'best', or 'better' with respect to worlds is short-sighted, having little or nothing to do with what the Christian reasonably expects when she expects God to create the 'best' He can.

This is especially so when God's world creating, as Rowe supposes, takes place in a no-best-world scenario. It has been shown that Rowe believes that God should delimit his choices of which worlds are acceptable to create, allowing Himself to only create worlds that are sufficiently good. The problem though is that for any world God creates, even if it is a world that is somehow sufficiently good, there exists the possibility of another even better world being created by another morally better being. But this overlooks, as Wainwright has pointed out, the fact that God has good reason to create worlds that include his gracious loving actions not just in

the world *post-creation*, but in the very act *of* creation. On the Christian conception, *no world* deserves God's creating it; yet He has apparently chosen to create anyway. While it may be true that some worlds are less deserving than others, it really seems as if God's omni qualities make it such that for any world God creates (considered apart from His existing at it), it is infinitely less perfect than He is. Really then, all worlds God can actualize appear to be unworthy of His actualizing them. And that is just fine for the Christian, for the Christian presupposes that God chose to create the actual world for no other reason than because He chose to. Now, it may be that God chose to create this world because it contained humans whom He loves, but this certainly would not count against God's morality. In fact, if there are more excellent creatures, God's loving humans more than He does some more excellent creature might count *in favor* of God's moral goodness. Might it be that Rowe expects God to be a world-creating snob in this sense? Snobbery seems to be an *immoral* attitude to have.

And what if we, again, consider Alvin Plantinga's argument that supposes that perhaps any world in which God exists (which is all possible worlds if He exists at all) is of unlimited great value (and, in some sense, tied for the best)?[96] If this is true, then God is able to create any world He so chooses since any world He chooses to create is of an infinite amount of goodness. Certainly then, God's creating any world that has an infinite amount of goodness (i.e. all possible worlds) absolves God of any possible wrong-doing or moral culpability for having done less well than He could have (or, as Rowe might suggest, *should* have).

Rowe's Principle B, then, appears to be severely short-sighted. The Christian theist can hold fast to her belief that God has not done anything morally repugnant or ill-devised with respect to His creation of the actual world because what Rowe misses is that God's actions must have as its purpose to rebound, resound, and redound to His glory. God's creative actions must

[96] Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'," pgs. 8-9.

been seen from a theocentric point-of-view rather than an anthropocentric point-of-view. God creates for Himself, not for any other; if He did, then He truly would be morally surpassable.

Ironically, according to Christian eschatology, it may even be the case that the actual world is a necessary pit-stop along the road toward the best creatable world (that is, the resurrected world). If that is the case then Rowe *really* has nothing to gripe about, for God has done what Rowe has wished all along, viz., He has created the best creatable world. But *is* the actual world the best creatable world? If so, how can the Christian answer the question "Why does God allow evil if this world is supposed to be the best?" These are the important question which we will attempt to answer in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Is the Actual World the Best Creatable World?

In chapters two and three I have argued two things: (1) God is free *in a significant way* to create (or refrain from creating) any world He so chooses, whether or not the world He chooses to create (if He chooses to create) is the best He can do; and (2) that God is not morally obligated to create any specific level-of-goodness world and that there is no clear world-creating ethic to which God is beholden.[97] In order to show that (1) is true, I argued against Rowe's point which I called (M). It went like this:

> (M) Given God's essential divine attributes, if there is a best world that God can create then God *must* create that world.

(M) is meant to imply that God is not free with respect to His actions (He only does what He does because of His necessary perfections) and so is not praiseworthy for having done them. Remember we saw that God's freedom is probably best viewed in a way different than we view specifically *human* freedom.[98] Moreover, I argued that freedom seems to have more to do with an ability to do what one *wishes* to do than it does with the *inability to do differently* than one did. In God's case, since His will is made up of that which He wishes to will (though not *all* that He wishes), then God wills what He wishes to will—and so is free. Perhaps most telling is that,

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[97] Really, the point is not that there is no world-creating ethic *at all*; rather, it is that if there is, then God is the author of said ethic. The point then is that God is not beholden to *Rowe's* (or any human's for that matter) world-creating ethic. In either case, there is no moral obligation for God to create a certain goodness-level world or even to create at all.

[98] See the quote from C.S. Lewis (above, p. 15) as an example.

on the Christian account, God's inability to do other than He does, viz., His always doing perfectly, may be the *ultimate* in freedom.[99] So, the Christian has a good reason to believe that (1) is true.

To see that (2) is true, we needed to show that Rowe's Principle B has some serious holes in it. To do this, we saw that the theist really needed only to contend with the "particular fault" since it undergirds Principle B. Rowe states the "particular fault" this way:

> (b) Failing to do better than one did is a defect only if doing better than one did is possible for one to do.

In an attempt to argue against (b), I posited that it is not at all clear how the "particular fault" does not devolve into the "general fault" in that it may not even be up to God which world gets *strongly* actualized[100] and, more importantly, the "particular fault" appears to leave no room for God's *gracious* actions. If there is no room for God's graciously creating a somehow less-desirable world on Rowe's view, then it seems to me that Rowe is expecting some sort of world-creating snobbery on the part of God—in which case, God would rightly be held morally culpable. In the end though, (b) seems to have been undercut and if that is the case, since (b) undergirds Principle B, then Principle B is undercut. We have seen, then, that the Christian has good reason to believe that God is both free and within His moral rights to create as He does (if He does).

That is all well and good, but does arguing for God's being free and morally impeccable *vis a vis* His creating world (or not) amount to much more than offering up potential defeaters for Rowe's atheistic claims? Not really; but then, it is not really meant to. So what now? It seems

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[99] As a fallen race, man's plight is to be *non posse non peccari*; however, through salvation and the justification process, man moves from *non posse non peccari* to *posse non peccari* and then, finally, *non posse peccari.* Man's freedom from the bondage to sin into a bondage to Christ (and His will) is seen as the ultimate in freedom for man (Romans 6:18). I argue that something similar holds true for God. See above, pg. 21.

[100] See my use of Wierenga's argument. Above, pg. 31.

to me that what is needed is a theodicy that does not just explain how it is possible for a perfect, loving, wholly good God to create a world with the types, kinds, amounts, etc. of evil that there are; rather, the theodicy must explain *why* the world we see (that is, the actual world) is the world God chose to create. Furthermore, we need to strive for some understanding of *why* the actual world must be the way it is if God is to create the best. (As I have argued earlier, it is not that God must create the best creatable world to best suit His created creatures. Creation is for God; however, I do think it safe to assume He *has* created the best, not *just* for Him, but for us—His created beings—as well.) To understand why and how this can be so, and to be properly Christian, the theodicy must be Christocentric. I find that the best theodical explanation of this sort is found in the "O Felix Culpa" model, my favorite of which is Alvin Plantinga's from his article "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'."[101] The plan for this chapter, then, is to lay out Plantinga's argument and consider some objections. After having considered the objections, we will see if Plantinga's argument can be strengthened in such a way as to answer the potential defeaters and, ultimately, take on Rowe's claims. I think it can and, as we shall see, if I am right, there are not only good reasons to think it is *possible* for God to create as He did (if He did), but that it was *necessary* for God to create as He did (if He did) in order to create the best possible creatable world.

I. Plantinga's 'O Felix Culpa' Model

For most of Alvin Plantinga's career, he has been, as Marilyn McCord Adams puts it: "a vigorous promoter and practitioner of *defensive apologetics*."[102] In a great many of Plantinga's

[101] Found in the Peter van Inwagen edited *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2004), pp. 1-25.

[102] Marilyn McCord Adams, "Plantinga on 'Felix Culpa': Analysis and Critique," *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (April 2008), p. 123. Emphasis in original.

articles and books that cover the subject of the problem of evil, he has simply made it his point to show that there is no logical inconsistency in the set of propositions:

(P) God exists and,

(Q) Evil exists.

Plantinga's main argument, of course, has been his Free Will Defense in which he attempts to find (and, I take it, does find) some R that when combined with (P) entails (Q).[103] The R that Plantinga finds is, simply put, that God created a world with free-willed creatures that will all possibly go wrong with respect to at least one morally significant action. The upshot, then, is that it is possible that God could not have created a world with freely-acting creatures that contains no moral (or natural[104]) evil. Yet, for all his success in the area of the problem of evil, Plantinga has, until recently, steered clear of "making any attempt to 'justify the ways of God to man,'" [105] that is, he has not made any attempt at theodicy.

In 2004, however, that all changed when Plantinga's article "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'" was published in the Peter van Inwagen-edited *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*. In it, Plantinga moved from his usual reluctance to postulate a Christian theodicy, in favor of focusing on defensive apologetics, to a belief that "Christian philosophers should also turn to a different task: that of understanding the evil our world displays from a Christian perspective."[106]

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[103] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, etc.

[104] Plantinga takes it that so-called natural evil is actually a product of the morally bad actions of demonic, yet freely acting, creatures; namely, demons. So, all evil is really *moral* evil. See his *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pg. 57-59.

[105] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2000), p. 459.

[106] Plantinga, "O Felix Culpa," pg. 5

In order to examine why it is that God chose to create a world with the types, kinds, amounts, and varieties of evil that there are, Plantinga explores the *O Felix Culpa* theodicy.[107]

Briefly, Plantinga's argument goes like this: since God is a necessary being, He exists at all possible worlds if He exists at all. In turn, this means that all possible worlds that God can weakly actualize have this great-making quality (viz., the existence of God) and so *all* possibly actualized worlds are very good. Moreover, Plantinga finds that there are no conditions under which God can create a world that is less than very good—every possible world God creates is very good.[108] This is not to say, however, that there are no worlds that are better than others. Here is the crux of the *O Felix Culpa* theodicy: some worlds God can weakly actualize contain the incomparably great goods of the Incarnation and Atonement of the Son of God.

Plantinga argues it is possible that, when confronted with the infinite number of worlds for possible creation, God wanted to actualize one of the best worlds He could find. These worlds, thinks Plantinga, were of *infinite* value because they contained the infinitely valuable

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[107] *O Felix Culpa* (which literally means "Oh happy sin," or "Oh fortunate fall") is found in a Catholic Easter vigil. The vigil reads: *O certe necessarium Adae peccatum: quod Christi morte deletum est. O Felix Culpa: quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemtorem*. Translated, it reads "O assuredly necessary sin of Adam, which has been blotted out by the death of Christ! O fortunate fall, which has merited such and so great a Redeemer!" See Kevin Diller's article "Are Sin and Evil Necessary For a Really Good World? Questions For Alvin Plantinga's *Felix Culpa* Theodicy," *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (January 2008), n. 3.

Note also that the earliest theodical mention of this (to my knowledge) can be found in Leibniz's *Theodicy*. He says "I have shown that among the older writers the fall of Adam was termed *felix culpa*, a fortunate sin, because it had been expiated with immense benefit by the incarnation of the Son of God: for he gave the universe something more noble than anything there would otherwise have been amongst created beings." *The Argument Reduced to Syllogistic Form* from *Theodicy* by G.W. Leibniz, translated by E.M. Huggard, edited with an introduction by Austin Farrer. Reprinted by permission of Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. In *Philosophy of Religion*: *Selected Readings,* 3rd ed. William L. Rowe and William J. Wainwright (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 1998), p. 217.

[108] Plantinga, "O Felix Culpa," pg. 8. This is not to say that really bad worlds are not conceivable; rather, it is to say that no such really bad world (say a world in which the creatures God has made live in unending agony) is *in fact* or *actually* possible. Plantinga puts it this way, "God wouldn't create such worlds. So perhaps there are imaginable or even conceivable worlds that are not very good; the fact is, however, no such world is possible. All possible worlds are very good."

goods of the incarnation and atonement.[109] So, on Plantinga's assumption, "there will be a certain level L of excellence or goodness, among possible worlds, such that all the worlds at that level or above contain incarnation and atonement."[110] Put another way, God took a look at all the worlds that He could weakly actualize and decided that the best He could create would be one of the worlds that contain incarnation and atonement, for their level of goodness was of an infinite amount. That is to say, that any world with incarnation and atonement is such that it is better than any world *without* incarnation and atonement. Because this is so, the worlds that are most eligible for God's actualizing processes (and by 'eligible' I just mean it would be suitable and fitting that God would actualize it) contain incarnation and atonement. But, if this is true, then any of the most eligible worlds for actualization will have to include both sin and evil. And here is why:

> For atonement is among other things a matter of creatures' being saved from the consequences of their sin; therefore if there were no evil, there would be no sin, no consequences of sin to be saved from, and hence no atonement. Therefore a necessary condition of atonement is sin and evil.[111]

So the answer to the question "Why does God permit evil?", thinks Plantinga, is: "because He wanted to actualize a possible world whose value was greater than L; but all those possible worlds contain incarnation and atonement; hence all those worlds contain evil."[112] What this means, then, is that if God wanted to create a best world (of the perhaps *infinitely* many that possibly contain incarnation and atonement, and so have a value greater than L), He had *no choice* but to permit sin and evil. Since incarnation and atonement are necessary

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[109] Ibid., 10.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid., 12

[112] Ibid.

conditions for any world to have a value greater than L, and since a necessary condition for atonement is sin and evil, then a necessary condition for the best of all possibly created worlds is sin and evil.

Perhaps this argument works for the existence of sin and evil, but what about *suffering*? Could there not be a world with sin and evil that does not include suffering? It seems obvious that the answer to such a question is "Yes;" however, Plantinga argues that suffering is, in the first place, a result of the malevolent actions of freely acting creatures who have turned their backs on God and, in the second place, a useful means of spiritual growth whereby the sufferer is enabled to come into closer communion with Jesus Christ by identifying with His suffering and so better reflecting the image of God to the world.[113] This better reflection of the image of God, then, is not possible *without* the requisite suffering.

Another objection might be that, if Plantinga is correct, then God is using token persons as *means* rather than *ends*. Put another way, God would be acting like a doctor, say, who purposefully spreads a deadly disease just so he can cure it and be seen a hero. Plantinga sees this as accusing God of "a cosmic sort of Munchausen Syndrome by proxy"[114] whereby God is using people and forcing them to suffer so that He can attain His goal of creating a best creatable world.[115] To handle this objection, Plantinga makes it clear that Munchausen Syndrome by proxy is an act of manipulation, whereas God's actions are not. Though it may be objected that the people God creates who suffer in this life (and perhaps in the next) have no choice in the matter (since they did not sign up for God's having created them to live in a world that includes

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[113] Ibid., 19.

[114] Ibid., 21.

[115] Or, at any rate, if there is no *best* (in an individual sense) creatable world, then a world with a value greater than L.

their suffering), Plantinga argues that because God has middle-knowledge and knows the outcomes of the counterfactuals of freedom, it is possible that His perfect goodness and love would not preclude His creating a world where His creatures suffer on account of the existence of evil. What is more, they would do so freely and not out of God's having manipulated them. Here is a lengthy, but helpful quote from Plantinga:

> Suppose…that God knew that if I were able to make that decision [the decision to be created in a world which includes incarnation, atonement, sin, evil, and suffering], I would freely accept the suffering: then too, so far as I can see, his being perfectly loving wouldn't at all preclude his permitting me to suffer for the benefit of others, or to enable him to achieve his end of actualizing a highly eligible good world. But suppose still further, that I am able to make the decision and in fact would not accept the suffering; but suppose God knows that this unwillingness on my part would be due only to ignorance: if I knew the relevant facts, then I would accept the suffering. In that case too, God's perfect love, as far as I can see, would not preclude his permitting me to suffer. Finally, suppose further yet that God knows that I would not accept the suffering in question, but only because of disordered affections; if I had the right affections (and also knew enough), then I would accept the suffering: in this case too, as far as I can see, his being perfectly loving would not preclude his allowing me to suffer. In this case God would be like a mother who, say, insists that her eight-year-old child take piano lessons or go to church or school.[116]

Plantinga argues three things, then. First, God, out of His perfect loving nature, wanted to create the best possible world that He could weakly actualize.[117] Second, any of the worlds God could create that would fall under the category of "best possible" all included the incarnation, atonement, and redeeming work of Jesus Christ (and so have a value greater than L where L is some level of goodness whereby a world is highly eligible for God's creation). And third, because this is so, all of the worlds most eligible for God's creative actions include sin, evil, and suffering. Therefore, sin and evil (and so suffering) are necessary conditions for the best of all possibly created worlds.

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[116] Plantinga, "O Felix Culpa," pg. 24. My insertion.

[117] Or, again, at least actualize one of the worlds from among the best, since there may be very many (perhaps infinitely many) that are, in a sense, tied for the best.

II. Objections to Plantinga's Model

To my knowledge, there are two significant objections in the literature that pose serious questions for Plantinga's new theodicy: one by Kevin Diller, the other by Marilyn McCord Adams. It will be quite helpful for our present purposes (that of finding a Christ-centered theodicy to rebut William Rowe's latest argument) to analyze the arguments of both Diller and Adams because their arguments can, I am sure, help us to strengthen Plantinga's O Felix Culpa theodicy. After having analyzed them both, we will be able—hopefully, at any rate—to form a finally successful theodical model.

Let us begin with Diller's objections, of which there are three that I find to be of significance. First, Diller argues that the towering good of incarnation does not require a fall into sin. Though he does agree with Plantinga that the incarnation is of "great-making value," he takes it that the New Testament advances the notion that believers are grafted together in Christ just because God became human.[118] Put another way, Diller does not see it that close intimacy with God the Father *requires* an experience of forgiveness and redemption and therefore does not require the atoning work of Christ. Diller argues that "the body of Christ may have been *given* to us, without needing to be *broken* for us" and so human intimacy with God might have been accomplished simply by God's incarnating Himself into human form—this does not require sin and evil.[119]

Second, Diller argues that in Plantinga's O Felix Culpa theodicy, means and ends are switched. Diller points out that, in most orthodox Christian circles, the atonement is the means by which redemption is the ends whilst Plantinga has it the other way around. His point, then, is that Plantinga is arguing that *the Fall* has become the means and the *atonement* has become the

[118] Diller, p. 91.

[119] Ibid., 91-92. Emphasis in original.

ends. Diller puts it this way: "The *Felix Culpa* approach swaps cost and value in the equation such that the value of the sacrifice of atonement is considered worth the cost of breaking relationship with creation."[120]

And third, though Diller grants that it might be possible for God to allow a person to suffer for the benefit of others in the world, he thinks it goes against the notion of "agent centered restrictions"[121] that God would allow a person to suffer *eternally* (as in the case of Hell) just because it is an element of the best possibly created world. He takes it that, if this is the case, then "the good of having participated in making the world a better place would not individually offset the quite personal cost of entering hell or even being annihilated."[122] What he means by this, I think, is that if God is perfectly loving, would He not have to have as a goal of world creation, the ultimate benefit for his created creatures? In other words, how could God create a world simply to attain His own ends (*even if* His ends are to create the best) at the cost of some of His creatures? Is that loving? Once again, if this is true, it seems that "on the *Felix Culpa* view the value of extravagance of God's sacrifice is made to be more valuable than the right relationship with God that the sacrifice is meant to restore."[123]

Marilyn Adams also has a few objections, though they are, in some sense, similar to those of Diller. First, she too makes an observation about Plantinga's theodical means and ends. Instead of arguing that the O Felix Culpa theodicy uses atonement as the ends with sin and evil as the means, she argues that, on Plantinga's view, God uses His *created beings* (namely,

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[120] Ibid., 93. Italics in original.

[121] Here, Diller is borrowing language from Marilyn McCord Adams which Plantinga quotes in his 'O Felix Culpa' article. Diller's reference can be found on page 93 of his article and Plantinga's on page 23 of his.

[122] Diller, p. 94.

[123] Ibid., 94. Italics in original.

humans) as a means to some divine cosmic end.[124] She makes the distinction between what she calls "God's global goodness" (by which she means God's goodness in world creating), and "God's person-oriented goodness" (by which she means God's goodness toward individual created persons).[125] She makes this distinction because if Plantinga is right, then while it may be true that God has shown himself to be excellent at world-creating, He has not done very much to verify the fact that He cares for, is loving of, or merciful to his created subjects. If sin, evil, and suffering are necessary for atonement, and atonement necessary for a world whose value is greater than L, then it seems that God is simply using His subjects to fit His own purposes, whether or not His subjects reap any benefits. What is more, if Plantinga is right, then even though "God calls on us to live out careers of sin, suffering, and evil, for the world's sake, for the sake of Divine purposes…nothing has yet been said about these careers advancing the creatures' good or well-being—which is what person-centered goodness, love or mercy toward an individual creature would require."[126]

She extends this objection further when she argues (similarly to Diller) that Plantinga's theodicy seems to require that some created persons must have a type of agency that is "wrecked and ruined" so as to be damnable for the sake of a greater than L level world.[127] This, she thinks, is separable from simply suffering; rather, if a person is created just to be damned then that person's life is not on the whole better to have lived than to have not. She wonders how, if on Plantinga's theodicy Pharoah, Judas, Hitler, Pol Pot, etc. have been created just to be damned, God's love and mercy can be shown in creating them as such.

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[124] Marilyn McCord Adams, "Plantinga on 'O Felix Culpa'," pg. 128-129.

[125] Ibid., 129.

[126] Ibid., 130.

[127] Ibid., 134.

What is more, Adams feels that Plantinga's O Felix Culpa has not sufficiently addressed the meaning of the existence of personal horrors in this world.[128] She argues that "Plantinga's 'Felix Culpa' Supralapsarian plot assigns a meaning to our horrors that deepens the horror participant's problem by explaining that God's attitude towards him/her is as bad or worse than s/he feared."[129] What she means is that if Plantinga is right, and suffering is a way in which a believer can enter into closer fellowship with God through identifying with Christ, then it is a terrible thing for a believer to realize that the only way for God to accomplish such, in her particular life, is to put her through such a horror. This, thinks Adams, would lead a person to count themselves a miserable person indeed. She, instead, argues that horrors are more appropriately thought of in an eschatological light whereby the believer is encouraged to endure the horrors of this life because of a great reward that awaits her in the life to come.

Finally, Adams is not so sure that atonement *is* a good of towering value. She, like Diller, takes it that since incarnation and atonement are not logically dependent on one another, that the atoning work of Christ might not be a necessary condition for tranquil relations between the created and the Creator. Here she makes an important distinction between the generic value of an *act type* and the generic value of an *act token*.[130] She puts it this way: "Good act tokens require the performance of an action of a generically good act type by the right person at the right time and place and in the right manner."[131] While she thinks that the generic value of the

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[128] She defines "horrors" this way: "evils participating in the doing or suffering of which constitute *prima facie* reason to believe the participant's life cannot be a great good to him/her on the whole and in the end." Ibid., 136. Or, as she states more elsewhere: "Evil is horrendous iff participation in *e* by *p* (either as a victim or a perpetrator) gives everyone *prima facie* reason to believe that *p*'s life cannot—given its inclusion of *e*—be a great good to *p* on the whole." Put more simply, horrors are evils in which participation seems to "*ruin lives"*. See her "The Problem of Hell," in *Reasoned Faith*, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1993). p. 301-304.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid., 131-132.

act types attributed to Jesus (namely, voluntarily condescending to take on humanity, humbling Himself in the form of a servant, sacrificing Himself for the sake of others, etc.) are generically good, she believes that the *act token* is not good. The act token, Adams believes, is that of God's deliberately putting some of His created beings in a position that will require His salvific actions. If this sounds familiar, it is because Plantinga addressed this type of problem when he rebutted the Munchausen Syndrome by proxy objection. Adams realizes this, however, yet still believes that if Plantinga is right, God amounts to not much more than "a cosmic child abuser, however within Divine rights an obligationless God necessarily remains."[132]

These are certainly important objections to consider. It seems to me, however, that the O Felix Culpa theodicy can be redeemed—so to speak. I find no reason why a victorious O Felix Culpa model cannot be reached. It is to this task that the discussion now turns.

III. Christ the Redeemer and the Best of all Worlds: A Victorious 'O Felix Culpa'

Handling the Objections

It certainly is true that Plantinga's current theodicy is not without holes. I do, however, think that because the O Felix Culpa theodicy is Christocentric at its core, it must be a theodicy that the Christian community can use, and use effectively. In order to do that though, some of the holes need to be filled. Let us now consider some of the objections we have just encountered.

I take it that the most potent objection we have seen so far (since both Adams and Diller mention different aspects of it) is the objection that the O Felix Culpa theodicy rearranges the order of the means and ends. Again, the argument is either that

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[131] Ibid., 131.

[132] Ibid., 132.

> Y. The Fall has become the means to bring about the ends found in the atoning work of Christ instead of the atoning work of Christ being the means to bring about the ends found in the reconciliation of man to God or,
>
> Z. Human creatures are used as a means to bring about God's ends of creating a better than level L world.

So how do we handle these different aspects of the means/ends objection? First, I take it that Y is correct; this is, indeed, a fault in Plantinga's argument. Because Plantinga sees the incarnation and atonement as of incomparably great value and as the *ultimate end* (as far as making a possible world possess a value greater than L) he is leaving out what Christianity holds is the *purpose* of incarnation and atonement; namely, the reconciliation of man to God and with it, the resurrection and restoration of, not only man, but the entire cosmos as well. This is of a value *at least as great* as just the incarnation or atonement. I am not even sure what the atonement would be without such an end goal; for reconciling man to the Father is purpose behind Christ's atoning work on the Cross.[133]

Second, I take it that Z is false, or at least weak. I think the statement is true, but the sentiment is misguided. Adams (whose objection is represented by Z) takes it that it would be *wrong* for God to use His created beings to bring about His ultimate ends;[134] however, why should we consider God's having used His creation for His own purposes as "not morally permissible?"[135] Perhaps it is true (and I take it that it is) that *humans* cannot morally use others as solely a means to an end; however, why must it be the case that *God* be a respecter of

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[133] It certainly is possible that this is what Plantinga is getting at when he says that the atonement is incomparably great; however, he does not flesh out the eschatological ends and so, I believe, leaves himself open to this objection.

[134] To be as accurate as possible, she doesn't *say* that it would be wrong for God to use humans in whichever way He wants (she actually says that she agrees that God is within His divine rights to do so); however, she does think His doing so would not equate with His being the loving God we take Him to be. I, for one, find it difficult to see the difference. Marilyn McCord Adams, "Plantinga on 'O Felix Culpa'," pg. 130.

[135] Ibid., 131.

persons? It seems rather clear from the Bible that God *is not required to be* a respecter of persons and His loving His created beings is simply out of His own graciousness and for *His own* glorification.[136] It must be asked, *for whom is the best possible world the best*? Remember that we said *God creates for Himself, not for any other* (above, p. 43). If this is the case, and it certainly seems that it is (at least in the Christian tradition since it is held that He was not required to create *at all*), then the best possible world—that is, any world of a value greater than L—must be the best *for God*. It is simply by God's grace that He loves us and cares for us, that He decided to create a world that not only best glorifies Him but also allows us to have fellowship with him in our fallen state and then, more perfectly, in our resurrected state. The proper sentiment, it seems to me, would be one of thankfulness that God uses His fallen creatures *at all* (whether as a species or person in particular); this, in itself, is an act of grace on His part, not an act of mercilessness. So, Z must be rejected. The Christian must view God's creative actions (or any actions) from a *theo*centric point-of-view rather than an *anthro*pocentric one.

Not unrelated are both Diller's and Adams's arguments against the O Felix Culpa view (as presented by Plantinga, at any rate) of suffering. Adams seems to suggest that Plantinga has left out the eschatological purposes of suffering. In other words, it is not just a means through which we can identify with Christ in this life, but that there are eternal rewards that await the

[136] To whit: Romans 9:19-24 – "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?' On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles." I will add, however, that while God is not required to be a respecter of persons, it seems that—even on Plantinga's model and contrary to Adam's claim—He does show his respect for His creatures in many ways in which He is not required. Primarily, as I state above, He uses His creatures to fulfill His decrees (even through their own free-willed actions), but secondarily He graciously gives to them the breath of life, His Word, revelation of all kinds, cognitive abilities, laughter, and so on.

sufferer in Heaven. It seems to me, however, that Plantinga's O Felix Culpa *does* address this issue when he says:

> Our suffering can enable us to be glorified, and achieve for us an *eternal glory*; but we aren't told how this works: how is it that our suffering is a means to this eternal glory? Elsewhere there are tantalizing suggestions: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead." (Philippians 3:10-11)[137]

And what of Adams's view that horrors and damnable lives are not adequately handled by the O Felix Culpa theodicy? It is, perhaps, true that Plantinga's model does not address these issues well enough. That is not, however, to say that the theodical model in question cannot handle these objections. Since the O Felix Culpa model holds that the incarnation of God and the atoning work on the Cross are both necessary conditions for a greater than L level world, then it is the case that sin and evil are necessary as well. As Plantinga points out, if significantly free creatures are free to do evil, and some of them do evil, they will cause suffering. It is not clear, then, that sin and evil can exist without there also being the existence of suffering. But it cannot just be suffering on a small scale. It seems to me that the suffering that is included in a world that requires the incarnation and atoning work of Christ must include the type of suffering that amounts to an Adams-type horror. If there were no such horrors, it does not at all seem clear that a greater than L level world would be possible, and here is why: Without the existence of horrors we could never have the incarnate God's own horror story, viz., the crucifixion. Since the crucifixion is the means by which Christ's atoning work was completed, it seems that the existence of horrors is necessary for the existence of atonement. As for Adams's objections based on the creation of those who would live damnable lives (Judas, Hitler, etc.), I believe these objections fall under the problem of wishing to view God's purposes from a person-centered

[137] Plantinga, "O Felix Culpa," pgs. 17-18.

point-of-view rather than a God-centered one. That is, it seems to me that her distinguishing between God's so-called "global goodness" and His "person-oriented goodness" is superfluous. There is simply God's goodness and His goodness has everything to do with accomplishing His will and purposes (which just are to glorify Himself). Moreover, I think Plantinga's preemptive rebuttal, that those created for damnation would agree to be created and be damned for the sake of God's glory if they had the requisite knowledge (i.e. they knew and understood the relevant facts), is true.[138]

Lastly, both Diller and Adams bring up the issue of whether or not the atonement is a towering great-good and whether or not it is necessary even if incarnation is. I will handle the latter portion first. While it is true that the incarnation is logically possible without entailing the atonement, I am not so sure that it is *actually* (i.e. metaphysically) possible. That is to say, the *purpose* behind the incarnation was the atoning work that would be accomplished as the climax of God's self-revelation. To argue that God's condescension into human flesh is what achieves a restored intimacy between God and man, as Diller does, is clearly false on the biblical account.[139] Christian orthodoxy holds that it is the *atoning work* on the Cross that accomplishes

[138] This goes back to the lengthy quote from Plantinga on p. 51 (above). I do not claim to know whether or not this is verifiable or falsifiable; I am unsure as to what such a procedure would even look like. However, I take it that the apostle Paul was of a similar mindset when he said, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple services and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen." Romans 9:3-5. Without getting into too much exposition, I take it that Paul is saying he would, if he could, give up his salvation for the sake of an entire nation of his racial kinsmen if this was a way to better glorify God. The point is that Paul had the relevant facts and so would have been fine with God taking away His salvific grace from Paul (if such were possible) in order to better glorify Himself by saving all of ethnic Israel. If this is true, then I think Plantinga's argument holds on a biblical account. But, of course, it is a person's own willful turning away from God that causes her not to have the relevant facts. If she did have the relevant facts, she would not have turned from God and so would not be damned.

[139] Diller, 91.

this. Otherwise, what would Christ have meant by, "It is finished" whilst He hung on the Cross if He could have uttered it as soon as He learned to talk as an infant?[140]

Adams's objection to atonement not being of great value on the O Felix Culpa model is somewhat trickier to handle. Her argument in one in which she is accusing God of Munchausen Syndrome by proxy, or at any rate, child abuse. It seems to me that Plantinga has fairly well dealt with the Munchausen objection; however, I do wish to make a further point. Let us assume, in some anthropomorphic sense, that there was a time when God took a look at all the possible worlds He could weakly actualize before having done so. Is it not possible that He sees the infinitely-many possible worlds that include freely acting human creatures and falls in love with them?[141] Moreover, is it not possible that He wants to create not only the best possible world for Himself (i.e. to best glorify Himself), but also a world that will give an opportunity to all of his created creatures to participate in best glorifying God that they would not otherwise have had (and so, a best possible world for them)? Further, is it not possible that God might choose to create one of these worlds even though it will require *His own* supreme sacrifice, the crucifixion of His Son, to accomplish these ends? Not only is this possible, but on the Christian account, it is actual. God did not have to avail His creatures (whether in particular or in general) of the ability to participate in God's maximal glorification; yet, He did. I find it hard to detect what is unloving or abusive about such an act.

O Felix Culpa! Indeed

Is the actual world the best creatable world, then? From a Christian perspective, it depends on how one views it. There is language to suggest that the actual world is awaiting

[140] John 19:30.

[141] I am at a loss as to how to best define what I mean here by 'falls in love with.' I mean by this just whatever prompted (in some anthropomorphic sense) God to graciously create, give His image to, care for, uphold the existence of, and save human creatures before He ever created one of them.

restoration and other language to suggest that there is a coming *new* Earth.[142] The point, though, is that not only is the actual world—both presently and eschatologically speaking—a world that best glorifies God, it also culminates in a, perhaps best expressed as, *better-than-can-be-imagined* world. And this is what the O Felix Culpa theodicy intends to show. God allows evil, sin, and suffering because He wants the greatest possible ends. A greater than level L valued world does not include just the incarnation and atonement, but what the incarnation and atonement bought, viz., the resurrection and restoration of the entirety of the cosmos. Just what does this redeemed and restored entirety of the cosmos look like? This is not exactly clear; but, it will include at least the impossibility of further sin, as well as death, suffering, and excess pain; all things will be made new.[143] I think a fair question to ask, however, is: could God, being omnipotent, have created the exact same states of affairs that occur after the redemption of the cosmos without there having been any actual redeeming? It is argued here that the answer is 'No.' Take for instance the example that follows.

Suppose there exists the possibility of a set of states of affairs *A* that make up a world β. To instantiate the states of affairs *A* that make up β, all God has to do is speak and β leaps into existence. Now suppose there is a world β* that has included in it a prerequisite requirement that the existence of the states of affairs *A* that constitute β come first such that the states of affairs *A** that constitute β* would not be possible without the existence of *A* first. In other words, β* is not possible without there having first been a world β. If God had decided to instantiate the states of affairs *A** that make up β* without having first instantiated *A*, it would have been

[142] Romans 8:19-23 and 2 Pet. 3:13, respectively, discuss each. Really though, the Greek in the Peter passage, with respect to a *new* earth, is καινην, which has to do with nature or quality (whereas νεοσ has to do with time and origin). So, both passages actually speak of a restoration of the world as opposed to a *brand new* (i.e. wholly different) world.

[143] Rev. 21:4

impossible, because if God had attempted to instantiate the states of affairs $A*$ that make up β* without having first instantiated the states of affairs *A* that make up β, he would have been thwarted by the fact that the states of affairs *A** that make up β* *necessarily* include the states of affairs *A* that make up β's coming first. Remember that possible worlds exist necessarily as sets of possible states of affairs. So since God cannot simply decide what is included in the best possible world or even what leads to it—for that issue is decided eternally and necessarily by the maximal set of possible states of affairs that necessarily make up a corresponding possible world—he can only choose which world to weakly actualize.

What if the best possible world for God to instantiate then is like β*? If it is, then is it not also possible that *this* world is like β, a necessary prerequisite for the best type of possible world? Is it not possible that, when looking at the panoply of possible worlds to instantiate, the type of world that best glorifies God is one that requires His redemptive actions in order to instantiate the states of affairs that make it up? Not only does it seem possible that this is the case, on the Christian model it is assumed that it in fact *is* the case. The best type of possible world is a world that has been redeemed through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It is a world that has been saved and, not only restored, but refined and made better than it ever has been—even better than the Edenic state.[144] Since the actual world is (on the Christian account) that type of a world—namely, a greater than L level world since it includes the incarnation of Jesus and His atoning work—then the actual world redeemed is a best possible world. So, it *is* possible then that the redemption of the actual world is a prerequisite for the states of affairs that make up the best possible world, the actual world redeemed.

[144] The Edenic state included, not only the ignorance of right and wrong, but also the possibility of evil. In the resurrected cosmos, it is believed that the possibility of sin and evil will have vanished and our decisions to follow or not to follow God will have been ratified.

If redemption is required, as we have seen, then that means that Christ is required—His existence, His suffering, His death, and His resurrection are all necessary conditions. Some may argue that Christ is not *necessary* because the Fall did not have to have to happen, or that God's incarnation *alone* would have been sufficient; however, in light of what has previously been said, this argument does not seem to hold. Since it is possible that the best possible world is like β*, then it is possible that the actual world (that is, the world as it currently is) is like β. If that is the case, then this type of world and all of its evils—all of which stem from the Fall according to Christianity—is necessary for the creation of the best type of creatable world. The Fall, then, and so sin and evil, had to happen because the redemption of the fallen cosmos has to happen. Since a possible world's state of affairs includes not only all the actions of free humans, but also the actions of God within a world, then this world included *necessarily* God's sending His own Son to live as a man, die, then raise Himself from the dead. This should not be confused with God *wanting* evil, or wanting to send Christ to die; rather, since God wanted to create the type of world which best glorifies Himself, He chose to instantiate the type of world that will culminate in that end. The evils in this world then are, quite literally, necessary evils. Without evil there would be no need of redemption; without need of redemption there is no need of Christ; without Christ there is no resurrected cosmos; without a resurrected cosmos there is no best type of all possible worlds. The person and work of Jesus Christ, then, is a necessary condition of the best type of all possible creatable worlds. [145]

[145] It is possible to object here that this seems to limit God's freedom with respect to His creative actions. Remember, though, that even if it is true (and there are good reasons to think otherwise, as we have seen) God necessarily creates the best (in the sense of that which most glorifies Him), He only does this necessarily because He Himself requires as much. Again, though, it is not clear to me that it *is* true that God *must* create the best (or best type); rather, what is clear that God *must* do is that whatever He does must be done perfectly (i.e. in a manner consistent with his divine attributes). I do not see how this limits God's freedom, even in a libertarian sense. See chapter two, above.

Is it at least plausible that Jesus Christ is necessary for the best creatable world? If Jesus is God, as Christianity holds, then it seems quite plausible that, since God is necessary for the existence of a world, Jesus is necessary for the existence of a possible world. For the Christian, the Bible may say as much.[146] So, it is possible that, when God looked through the catalogue of possible worlds, His decision to create a best type of world (a world whose value is greater than L) which contained freely acting moral agents—humans—entailed His creating *this* world first (i.e. the states of affairs we currently find in the present, actual world), one that required His redeeming action through the sending of His own Son.

The O Felix Culpa theodicy, as I have argued it here, seems to be successful. The states of affairs that make up the resurrected and redeemed cosmos are not possible without the states of affairs that make up the world as we currently find it; that is, the states of affairs in which the incarnation of the Son of God and His atoning work on the Cross have obtained. The intent of the O Felix Culpa model was to provide an answer to the question "Why does God permit evil?" It seems the Plantingean model (with a few modifications, chief of which is the realization that the incarnation and atonement—while great goods in themselves—are *means* rather than *ends* which buy the redemption of the fallen cosmos at the eschaton) has provided an adequate answer that the Christian believer can rely on. "God wanted to create a highly eligible world, wanted to actualize one of the best of all possible worlds; all those worlds contain atonement [and so, the incarnation], hence they all contain sin and evil."[147]

[146] Specifically John 1:3 – "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

[147] Plantinga, "O Felix Culpa," p. 12. My insertion.

IV. Applying O Felix Culpa to Rowe's *Can God be Free?* and the Underlying EAE

What about Rowe's underlying evidential claims against the existence of God? Have we answered the objections that undergird his current argument? Recall his two premises and conclusion:

> P1: There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
>
> P2: An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
>
> C1: There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.[148]

It seems to me we *have* answered these objections. If it is true that Rowe's EAE is the undergirding argument for his arguments in *Can God be Free?*, then we have good reason to believe—it seems to me, at any rate—that his current argument falls as well. Remember that what Rowe is looking for, herein, is the existence of some so-called 'God-justifying-goods' to make up for all the evils (types, kinds, and particulars) that are in the world.[149] So, if my theodical attempts have been successful, then we *do* have God-justifying-goods we know of such that our knowledge of them defeats P1, namely, the incarnation and atoning work of Jesus Christ.[150] Since God (though He was not morally required to do so, and was free to do otherwise) chose to create a greater than L level world, He had no choice but to allow sin, evil, and suffering. Not just minor suffering either, He would have allow the worst kinds of suffering

[148] Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and some Varieties of Atheism," p. 127-128.

[149] Rowe, "Evil and God's Freedom in Creation," p. 103.

[150] Further, it is plausible that P2 is not even true; however, we need only to defeat P1 to invalidate Rowe's argument.

as well. For without which, this world (or any greater than L level world) could not have existed since they require, among other things, Jesus' atoning work on the Cross.

It is, perhaps, true that God could have created another greater than L level world wherein there are different *particular* evils; however, any greater than L level world cannot escape the necessity of having to include sin, evil, and terrible suffering. It may be that the token people (as well as other token animals) in another possible greater than L level world who undergo suffering are different token people than those in the actual world. The point is, however, that in any case, terrible suffering will happen; it is unavoidable in a greater than L level world, if for no other reason than in *all* greater than L level worlds, Jesus undergoes terrible suffering as part of His atoning work. Though the gruesome death and suffering through which the one blameless Man (according to Christian belief) must go is an intrinsic evil, it is of—I argue—infinite levels of extrinsic value and goodness. No best type of all possible creatable worlds can exist without this instance of intense suffering.

Further, suppose Rowe accepted—just for the sake of the argument—that, on the Christian account, a greater than L level world really does require intense suffering (because, there is, at least Jesus' crucifixion). It seems plausible to suggest that, in order to be consistent with his EAE premises, Rowe would have to argue that any greater than L level world must include *other* instances of intense suffering as well, not just Jesus'. Here is why. It seems to me that (given the requirements for a greater than L level world, and supposing that Rowe accepts such), if Rowe is going to be consistent with his EAE premises he would have to argue that God cannot just brutally sacrifice His Son for sins such as lying, cheating, cursing, etc. Rather, Rowe would have to argue that God can only brutally sacrifice His Son in a world that includes the sorts of sins that merit such a sacrifice, namely, murder, rape, torture, etc. If Rowe did, in fact,

argue this way, he would be arguing that a greater than L level world cannot exclude the existence of perhaps very many instances of intense suffering. In other words, he would have to argue

> P1*: There *do not* exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

Because it may be that for God to weakly actualize any world resulting in the incarnation and atoning work of Jesus, such a world must include enough instances of intense suffering to justify God's redemptive actions in this way. So, it may be that, if God had prevented a *particular* instance of intense suffering from happening, He would have had to allow another one in its place.

Rowe, as far as I know, *does not* accept the proposition that a greater than L level world includes the incarnation and atoning work of Jesus. If he did, and supported P1*, his entire EAE would be invalidated. But, P1 does not seem to do much good against the Christian theist either. While the Christian will be happy to accept the truth of P1*, she will find P1 to be false, rendering the EAE invalid on the Christian account.[151] For the Christian then, the EAE is less than intuitive, and it is its *prima facie* intuitiveness that is supposed to be its strength.[152] If it is true that this argument is less than intuitive to the Christian—and I think it is—then it appears

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[151] I suppose Rowe could object and say that Christians would *not* find P1 to be false since God could have prevented a *particular* instance of intense suffering. The problem with this objection is that P1 is not arguing for the possibility of *some other world* in which Jones suffers instead of Smith suffering as she does in the actual world. Of course *that* is possible. Instead, P1 is asserting that God could eliminate an instance of intense suffering and not have to replace it with another instance of intense suffering. As we have already argued however (see above, p.59), suffering seems to be of great value even in and of itself, so long as our affections toward God are in order. Moreover, it is plausible to suggest that God, since He does all things in a manner consistent with His divine attributes, could not create a world in which there were *surplus* evils. And, this is what granting the truth of P1 (as I take it Rowe means it) would amount to. So, no, a Christian could not find P1 to be true (at least, not if they hold to the OFC model).

[152] It seems to me anyway, given his appeal to various 'appears to' claims. See pp. 129-130 of Rowe's "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism."

that Professor Rowe will have to come up with something else entirely to undergird his current arguments in *Can God be Free?*.

It is clear that whether or not this world is the best type of world God could have weakly actualized (if God's goal was in fact to create the best type of all possible worlds—that contains freely acting humans—in the end) depends heavily upon one's definition of 'best.' Clearly, Rowe does not take this to be the best world (type *or* token) that God could have weakly actualized. (And, perhaps it is not—in the Rowean sense. The crux of the argument is, however, that if God did indeed want to create the best type of all creatable worlds this type of world must come first and is thereby the best type of creatable world whose τελος is a resurrected cosmos that is *better-than-can-be-imagined*.) However, given Christian theism and the redemptive story throughout the Bible, does it not appear likely that a 'best' world in a Rowean sense would actually *detract* from the Christian belief about God? Since Christian theism teaches that sin and evil will be widespread does it not follow then that the existence of these things is actually evidence *for* God's existence? The whole of the Christian faith hinges on the hope that God does in fact love the world and did in fact send His Son to die for it. His love and subsequent sacrifice would not even be necessary if it were not for the existence of sin. Rowe might object that the world started out as perfect in the Garden, but the picture in Scripture is clear: if God does in fact restore the paradise that was lost, it will actually be *better* than before; and this seems to have been His plan all along—at least according to Christian theism, which, I take it, is what matters for the Christian theist in defeating the problem of evil.

If the O Felix Culpa model holds, then it has been shown then that, despite appearances, perhaps the actual world is the best type of creatable world (especially when viewed through an eschatological lens), with its horrendous evils and all. It has also been shown that it is at least

plausible that for the states of affairs that constitute the best type of all possible worlds to be instantiated, there must be a previous set of states of affairs that must go through a maturation process—growing pains of sorts—before they can blossom into what God finally intends; namely, the states of affairs that constitute the best type of all possible worlds. In other words, the incarnation and atoning work of Jesus Christ are a necessary condition of the resurrected cosmos, which is the eschatological end to any greater than L level world. Since the *purpose* of Jesus was not simply incarnation, but also atonement so as to rescue the fallen world, Jesus Himself is a necessary condition of the best type of all creatable worlds.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

There have been two overarching goals throughout this effort. The purpose of chapters two and three were to accomplish the first of these two goals, namely, analyzing William Rowe's latest arguments against the Western theistic conception of God in his *Can God be Free?*, and then defending specifically *Christian* theism against such arguments. The purpose of chapter four was to accomplish the second—and I think more significant—goal: to take what we have learned from defending Christian theism against Rowe's most recent arguments, seeing that his EAE is the backbone of said arguments, and then attempt to formulate a specifically Christocentric theodicy against those claims. Thankfully, Alvin Plantinga has already devised such a model by way of his 'O Felix Culpa' theodicy. So, the attempt in chapter four was to strengthen any weaknesses in Plantinga's current formulation of the theodicy and then pit that against Rowe's recent arguments (and underlying EAE) in order to illustrate that the 'O Felix Culpa' theodicy is successful and that the Christian theist can provide a substantial answer to the question "Why does God allow evil, sin, and suffering to occur?" It seems to me that we have been successful in our endeavor.

In chapter two we saw that God is free *in a significant—and, perhaps, libertarian—way* though not necessarily in the same way we normally think with respect to free *human* action. But that is just the point: human libertarian free action is not the pinnacle of free action. On the Christian account, being able to do other than rightly is not an advantage brought about by true

freedom; rather it is a curse brought about by a *bondage* to sin. God, whose will is perfectly free, can do no other than rightly because His will is perfect; He always wills to do rightly according to His own divine perfections. It seems to me that any rational being who acts according to her own, natural will and inclination is free with respect to her actions. Rowe has argued that because God is not free in the libertarian sense of free action (i.e. God cannot do other than perfectly), God is neither praiseworthy for His perfect actions, nor is our Western theological conception of Him correct. I have tried to show, however, that this is simply not true. If anything, it is the other way around.

God is praiseworthy *because* He can act in no other way than perfectly and, moreover, it is not the Western theological tradition that has its concept of God confused, it is Professor Rowe. God *is* free; He just is not free in the limited *human* sense. Moreover, God's always acting perfectly only necessitates that he acts perfectly, it does not necessitate what *particular* action He does, just so long as the action is consistent with His divine attributes. What we have seen, is that God's creation of a world (especially if we consider that if God exists He exists at all possible worlds) is free since any world He creates is of unlimited value. It does not seem plausible that there are, if God exists, any such possible worlds that are unactualizable. What is more, from a biblical perspective, God's freedom from the inability to do rightly seems the ultimate in freedom. A person who is in bondage to sin is *non posse non peccari*, a person who is undergoing the sanctification process is *posse non peccari*, and the resurrected person is *non posse peccari*. So since God is by nature *non posse peccari*, and the ultimate freedom for man is to be made *non posse peccari* so as to better image God to the world, then real freedom is actually the inability to will to do otherwise than rightly. Put another way, it is the *freedom from* the 'ability' to will to do wrongly. It is not as if the person's will is not free; rather, the person's

will is *finally* free to always and only will to do rightly. Since God is only ever this way, the Christian, I think, will find this all the more reason to praise and worship Him.

The attempt in chapter three was to show that there is no specific world-creating ethic to which God is beholden, and moreover, God is free (in the moral sense) to create whichever world He so chooses (if He so chooses), whether or not it is the best He can do. We saw that Rowe's Principle B was the main premise we had to fight against, and that it had as its undergirding support the notion that God is susceptible to the *particular fault* of creation. This meant that God is not at fault for creating *some world or other* than which there is a better; rather, what God is faulted for is having created *this* world (or *any* particular world) rather than another that is better. In other words, the *particular fault* faults God for having created, say, world 700 instead of world 701 (where 700 and 701 are indicators of how good each world is in some infinite scale of good worlds where each world's goodness is marked by a designated real number). What we saw, however, was that Principle B and its undergirding *particular fault* are flimsy at best.

While Edward Wierenga demonstrated that it may not even be up to God which worlds are strongly actualized, William Wainwright helped us see that the world God creates must allow for Him to shower His gracious love on His creation. What this means is that Rowe's *particular fault* actually poses on God a sense of moral snobbery such that He is forced to eliminate from the set of eligible worlds to create (if ever there was such a set) the worlds in which He could *most* show His gracious love. What is more, on the Christian conception, God's choosing to create a world (or, any of His actions, really) is for the purpose of self-glorification. What this means is that God creates to please Himself, not any other. So, God is both free with respect to His actions and His moral unsurpassability to create any world He pleases (if He pleases).

In chapter four I made my, perhaps, most daring claim that sin, evil, and suffering are necessary conditions for the best type of all creatable worlds because the incarnation and atoning work of Jesus Christ are necessary conditions of the best type of all creatable worlds. Using Plantinga's 'O Felix Culpa' theodicy (with some minor edits), I tried to show that according to Christian theism, the *redeemed/resurrected* cosmos is the best type of all creatable worlds and that the resurrected cosmos is not possible without there first having been a Redeemer, viz., Jesus Christ. We saw that, according to Christian theism, it is possible that when God took a look at all the possible worlds He could create, the worlds that had the highest value (i.e. were the most eligible for creation) were worlds that include Incarnation and Atonement. It is not that there are not some really great possible worlds that did *not* include these; rather, it is that the *best* type of possible world did, and so God (though He was not required to do so because He could have chosen to create *any* world) chose one of them to create—the actual world. My theodical conclusion, then, is that God permits sin, evil, and suffering because Jesus Christ is a necessary condition of the best type of all creatable worlds (where Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God whose sole purpose is to glorify the Father by giving Himself as a willing sacrifice in order to atone for the evils[153] in the world and redeem the world back to the Father).

Jesus Christ or Joseph Christ?

This brings me to an important objection to my thesis that, specifically, *Jesus* Christ is a necessary condition for the best type of all possible creatable worlds. The question is whether or not it is logically necessary for the Second Person of the Divine Trinity's (and so the Person who became incarnate) name to be Jesus. Could it have been, say, a Joseph Christ or some other such

[153] Herein, I have not specifically dealt with natural evils. There is, I think, a good reason for this. Genesis 3 (the story of the Fall of Man) and Romans 8:19-23 indicate that natural evils are a result of the Fall, which is an instance of moral evil. If this is true, then *all* evils are the product of moral evils.

sinless Savior?[154] Before answering this question outright, let me first say that, for my theodicy to work, I need not hold to such a strong proposition as *Jesus Christ is a necessary condition of the best type of all possible creatable worlds*. I can simply say, as Plantinga does, *Incarnation and Atonement are necessary conditions of the best type of all possible creatable worlds*. Even with this weaker proposition the Christian can still rely on the 'O Felix Culpa' theodicy to answer the question (and, I think, answer the question well): "Why does God allow evil, sin, and suffering?"

In order to hold to the stronger proposition, however, my answer to the first question (Is it logically necessary that the incarnate God's name be Jesus?) is "Yes" and my answer to the second question (could God incarnate have been, say, a Joseph Christ, etc.) is "No." Here is why I am specifically arguing that *Jesus* Christ is a necessary condition of the best of all possible creatable worlds. I do not take it to be the case that Jesus was a random person that God chose to pour Himself into. This, it seems to me, is what would be the case if a *Joseph* Christ was possible. I take it that, instead, Jesus *just is* God incarnate and God incarnate *just is* Jesus. God could not have incarnated Himself as some other man, chiefly because *no other man* is, or could be, God—Jesus *is* God.

A thesis like this, of course, raises many questions with respect to what it means exactly for a person to be who they are, and specifically, what it means for Jesus to be Jesus. I do not believe that there is much to Jesus that is accidental; His *very name* even has a purpose.[155] He probably would have to be a Mediterranean Jew (or, at any rate, Mediterranean), though I do not claim to know whether or not race is a necessary condition of personal identity. I do not take it that Jesus necessarily comes from the line of David; I do suppose there is some possible world

[154] This question was raised by Dr. Edward N. Martin, my thesis mentor and chair.

[155] Yeshua (the Hebrew name of Jesus) means "God saves," an indication of God's purposes for sending His Son.

where Saul is the good King and David the crooked King, perhaps some possible world where neither exists and, still, Jesus does. I do not take it that Jesus' DNA is dependent on any particular human genetics—not even Mary's, His mother in the actual world. Yet, for all I know, these could be necessary conditions for Jesus Christ's existence; however it is not at all clear to me this is the case through Holy Scripture. Questions such as these deserve a thesis project all their own, so I shall not attempt to answer such questions here, for an attempt at such is well beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say, however, I do think that there are very many possible worlds in which Jesus exists, and in each of these possible worlds He is God incarnate whose sole purpose is to redeem the world (that is, whichever world in which He exists) through His atoning work.

So, Leibniz Was Right

If this theodical attempt has been successful, then it turns out that Leibniz was right all along.[156] It is true that the actual world is the best (or among the best) of all possible creatable worlds because it includes the infinitely great goods of Incarnation and Atonement and, moreover, results in the resurrected/redeemed cosmos—the biblical picture of the best type of all worlds. As we have seen, however, God's creating the best possible was not out of a lack of significant freedom; rather, He created this world (if He created it), the type best world, because of His gracious love for His creatures. God was free to choose any world to weakly actualize (because they all include His existence and so are very good worlds and, therefore, are eligible for His creation); yet He chose to create one of the best possible even though it included a great

[156] In a sense, anyway. Remember that Leibniz argued that the actual world is the best *possible* world without making the distinction between *possible* worlds and *creatable* worlds. This is what Plantinga referred to as "Leibniz's lapse." See his *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pp. 34-44, or see the distinction I made above at the beginning of chapter 2.

cost to Himself, namely, the sacrifice of His only Son. William Rowe's thesis, then, appears less daunting than at first blush and perhaps even wrong-headed.

I need to mention one further point against Rowe, since I think I have been successful in showing his thesis in *Can God be Free?* to be faulty, as well as providing a cogent Christocentric theodicy. Because, on the Christian account, a world that needs redeeming is one that best rebounds, redounds, and resounds to God's glory, it almost seems as though Rowe should be arguing the opposite of what he does. To level a proper problem of evil attack at Christian theism, Rowe may be better served by arguing that there is *not enough* evil and that God should have made the current world *worse* so that He can better redeem *it*. Perhaps better yet, it might be more advantageous for Rowe to argue that evil *does not* exist. That way, if it can be shown that there is not any evil, then it can be shown that there is no need for a redemptive process that leads to the ultimate in God's glorification. Moreover, if it can be shown that there is no evil, and Christianity presupposes the existence of evil, then Rowe has a significant defeater to Christian theism (at least). I doubt, however, that Rowe, or anybody else for that matter, would be willing to make such an argument. It seems to me, rather, that God has done what Rowe has wished all along: He has freely created a best of all possibly created worlds.

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