

Liberty University Graduate School

Trinity, Freedom, & Evil:
The Importance of the Triune Nature of God in the Problem of Evil

A Report

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Course

PHIL 689 Thesis

by

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December 1, 2017

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

There may not be any other greater problem for skeptics and believers alike than evil. Evil has always lurked within humanity. Religions have tried to explain it. Philosophies have tried to make sense of it. Evil is an everyday problem. The immensity of which is broadcasted throughout all media channels. Christianity in particular has had many who challenge the validity of their claims because of this stumbling block.

Traditionally the problem of evil states: if there is an all-loving, all-powerful God, why does evil run amuck in the world? It would seem either he is not all-loving or all-powerful, for both of those claims would suggest he would do whatever it takes to eradicate the presence of evil in the lives of those whom he loves and would have the power to do so. Therefore, a possibility of an all-loving and all-powerful God is illogical.

In *God, Freedom, and Evil*, philosopher Alvin Plantinga has largely laid the tension of the logical problem of evil to rest. He argues that God does have a morally sufficient reason to allow the existence of evil, which is libertarian free will. This is a will to choose that is free to choose its own destiny and un-coerced into any action. Free will is possible only if an agent has the capacity to choose either good or evil. So Plantinga demonstrates that God does have a good reason to allow evil after all.

However, this isn't just a logical problem that needs only to be shown that in fact there is compatibility between God and evil. Times have changed. As philosopher Charles Taylor says, we now live in a secular age. Here, no belief is axiomatic. Commenting on this, James K. A. Smith says,

What makes ours a "secular" age, [Taylor] writes, is not that it is defined by *unbelief*, but rather that belief is contestable and contested. Belief of every sort is "fragilized," as

Taylor puts it — destabilized by rival accounts and doubts. For more traditional “believers,” this means their faith is attended by doubt as a constant companion.¹

The problem of evil has the power to keep someone from coming to faith in God or to lose one’s faith. While the problem of evil wasn’t always a roadblock to faith, now it’s also even brings down those who do believe. Everyone is a skeptic now. There’s no going back either, Taylor says. Yet, this isn’t the only barrier to faith; there are numerous ones, such as pluralism and historicity. If someone is to consider faith in God in this secular age, the skeptic needs an adequate response showing how God not only allows evil, but is involved in it as well. The answer also needs to be believable. For example, one can explain that a God whose *modus operandi* is unconditional love would not only allow people to go to Hell, but would allow it precisely because he is a God of love and therefore cares about justice.

There are certain issues concerning how the problem is handled in philosophy. While Plantinga and others have done an amazing job at giving a theodicy or defense to the skeptic, they take a “restricted standard theism” approach as Marilyn Adams says.² Here the person of God in this role is rather an abstract. He is the “God of the Philosophers,” yet he remains aloof for the most part. This may be for necessity or simplicity. Unfortunately, the same answers could theoretically be applied to Allah or another monotheistic religion.

Because Christian philosophers and theologians have taken the standard theism approach whole-sale and apply it for everything as a stand in for the Trinity, assumptions about a Unitarian conception of God have rarely been challenged because it would *prima facie* be seen as attacking Christianity and undermining itself. However, in fact, it is *not* challenging standard theism which

¹ James K.A. Smith, "How My Millennial Students Found Their 'Hitchhiker's Guide' to a Secular Age," The Huffington Post, November 27, 2016, , accessed September 14, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/charles-taylor-philosopher_us_58067afde4b0180a36e700f3.

² Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 3.

has actually undermined Christianity by not allowing its distinctive resources to flourish. Because of this, there lacks a healthy and robust literature on specifically Trinitarian resources for the problem of evil. So there are three aspects which this paper will address, 1.) Question the assumed narrative of simple standard theism, 2.) Approaching the problem of evil from the starting point of the Trinity, and 3.) Communicating a logical and aesthetically pleasing response to the problem of evil, which flows from the former.

B. Statement of the Purpose

The central aim of this thesis is to answer the question of what a specifically Christian Trinitarian conception of God has to offer in response to the problem of evil. In this paper I intend to give a Trinitarian defense to the problem of evil from an evangelical perspective. This paper will show that the Trinity has unique resources for the problem of evil. Any response should demonstrate that in order to become an acceptable framework for a contemporary skeptic, it must not only be logical but also aesthetically pleasing in an explanatory sense. While there has been excellent work done showing the logical compatibility of God and evil and, it has mostly assumed a standard theistic conception, or a “God of the Philosophers,” as its starting point. Does this make any difference? Do all conceptions of God give the same answers to the problem of evil?

First, through abduction, this paper will examine whether or not the standard approach of taking a general theistic conception of God (which is normally assumed as a Unitarian conception³) contains the adequate explanatory power to generate a persuasive or adequate response to the problem of evil. Recently, philosophers have claimed that this conception should be discarded. Yet, the only reason they give, is to remain true to one’s convictions. Second, this

³ This would be any God that is defined as one person and substance, as opposed to the Trinity which is three persons yet same substance.

paper will examine what unique resources there are, if any, for the problem of evil if one assumes a Trinitarian conception of God. It will discuss the Trinity and whether or not its essential nature is love. If it is love, then it will also discuss how exactly this may give greater explanatory power for the problem of evil. Third, this paper will not only examine why a “God of love” allows certain evils, but examine how He responds to evil, in a proactive and active sense.

C. Statement of Importance of the Problem

Whether or not the problem of evil can be adequately answered determines if Christianity can have any place in the plausibility structure of a contemporary person. A plausibility structure is what determines whether a belief in something is believable. For example, ghosts are not that plausible for the average educate New Yorker, but would be for a local Haitian where voodoo is widely practiced. One contemporary philosopher studying in this area, Charles Taylor, notes in *A Secular Age*, that 500 years ago disbelief in God was mostly unimaginable. However, now belief in God is hardly an option for a secular society. One of the key stumbling blocks for Western society today is the problem of evil. If there is no good explanation for this phenomenon there will be no room in the market place of ideas for Christianity. If it can be adequately demonstrated that Christianity is not only logically compatible with evil, as the leading Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga has done, but also illuminating and winsome, then Christianity not only holds a place among others in the market, but would also be a good choice to pursue as an explanatory framework and worldview with one’s whole being.

While there has been a tremendous amount of literature on the subject, most of it has been in a generic sense. It usually revolves around this issue like a math problem, and whether or not something logically entails another. Don’t get me wrong, this is absolutely necessary.

However, this is only the start. After reading *God, Freedom, and Evil*, a skeptic may arduously concede that there is not an explicit contradiction between an Anselmian conception of God (as the greatest conceivable being) and the presence of evil, granted by the explanatory power of libertarian freewill. This point will not persuade most readers. Moreover, most responses to the problem of evil are created in such a way that they could be used by any conception of God. And that is part of the problem; they are not specifically Christian responses.

Recently, however, there have been a few specifically Christian responses to the problem appear. These attempt to view and make sense of the problem of evil through the lens of the Trinity. This has been quite an achievement. Unfortunately, most of these responses fall in some way or another. In attempting to hold on the Trinitarian orthodoxy the budge on some other part, whether that's other aspects of God or salvation, or adequately deal with evil in all its forms. Altogether, they do not constitute an adequate protestant evangelical Trinitarian response to the problem of evil. So all together, there is a need to 1.) formulate a response to the problem and kinds of evil that is illuminating to one's plausibility structure, by 2.) being thoroughly Trinitarian while 3.) holding to the essential tenants of protestant evangelical orthodoxy. Finally, 4.) it presents a polemical apologetic against religions who hold to a Unitarian conception of God.

D. Statement of Position

Not only does a Unitarian conception of God inadequately answer the problem of evil, it is not persuasive either. This conception should be rejected by Christian theists. More specifically, a Unitarian God does not have an adequate grounding for a free will response. After this, there is little left to support itself against the problem of evil. Instead, what separates Christianity from every other religion, and what they should hold to, is the Trinity. It is from this fount that all else springs forth: salvation by grace, redemption through atonement, bodily

resurrection, etc.⁴ Many religions possess elements which would be considered essential to the Christian faith, but none possess the Trinity. This also means that none can have what only the Trinity can offer.⁵ So God being a Trinity would make a great deal of difference in how the problem of evil is managed. A Trinitarian conception not only provides an aesthetically pleasing explanation to the problem of evil, it is the only conception that should be pursued based on the specific theological riggings it has to offer. It seems that only a triune conception of God would have a nature that provides a good grounding for a free will defense. Another example of a specifically Christian resource is the Incarnation. The suffering Christ experienced through the Incarnation connects him to humans, which makes the redemption of evil possible.

E. Limitations

There are many related topics this paper will not cover. This paper will not examine how other religions treat and answer the problem of evil. Yet at times, this it will have a short side bar to compare what *is* being said of how Christianity answers the problem as to what another like-minded religion might have to say, in order to distinguish the two or show the uniqueness of the Trinity. This paper will also not analyze how Judaism, answers this as a complement to Christianity. God commanding “genocide” in Old Testament will also not be covered, and is beyond the scope of this paper as it is a specific factor that goes into cultural and expository detail. Nor is this a field guide for we can change the world specifically. This is not a social justice paper. However, it will cover the way we start to become involved in the Triune work already in progress, how the Triune God invites us to redeem evil and suffering.

F. Method

⁴ Reeves notes even a form a Buddhism in which Salvation is through grace alone. Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*, 8.6.2012 ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 15

⁵ *Ibid*, 14

i. Research Methods

The primary method of research will be research done through the library. Data will be collected not only what contemporary scholars (Christian and non-Christian) have to say, but also dig into the what the church of old through the Fathers and Saints have had to say. This will primarily be a descriptive approach, building a bridge over the gap between what has already been said about the Trinity and the problem of evil. It will do this with also giving a solution to the problem in the form of what the average person can do. This research will be experiential in part trying to propose new ways of how to look at this problem from a Trinitarian Framework.

ii. Tests or Questionnaires

Tests or Questionnaires will not be needed or used. This is not an analysis of what people think, but a research paper.

iii. Data Analysis

Data analysis will be simple and straight forward, as has been said already. It will seek to survey the broad literature on the topic and develop a coherent solution to the problem of evil.

G. Development of Thesis

i. Proposal for the Chapter Divisions

Chapter I will serve as a state of the union address. It will help the reader to appreciate what is at stake and what must be done. The problem of evil has been solved logically by Alvin Plantinga. Yet this does not help a general a wide audience, nor does it help redeem the problem. Furthermore, we see a “god of the philosophers” simply does not have the necessary tools to give a holistic answer. Chapter II will serve as an introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity. While readers may already be Christian this will serve for anyone who is unfamiliar with it and help to clear up any misunderstandings. This will also serve as an exposition of the exact nature of the

Trinity and its implications and practical importance in various context. This is the ground from where all unique and powerful tools spring forth need to handle the visceral reaction to evil. Chapter III will briefly look at what exactly is meant by ‘love.’ This is an important clarification if love is the central description of the nature of God. Many in contemporary cultural can go astray on this very point. The word, action, and concept of love is awash with many meanings. It has been virtually abused in today’s sarcastic and exaggerating society. Sorting through this will help redefine what we mean by a “God of love,” and more precisely what his action would and would not look like. Chapter IV will most certainly carry the bulk of the paper. It juxtaposes the ontological nature of the Trinity and subsequent implications with the problem of evil. Justice, Forgiveness, Atonement, Suffering, are all features that on a Trinitarian framework give adequate explanatory power to how God lives in tension with the problem of evil. It will address how humanity is also included in this. Chapter V will end with a brief overview and conclusion.

ii. Proposed Summary of Each Chapter

Summary of Chapter 1

Chapter one will introduce the problem of evil and the crucial necessity to have an adequate answer. To begin one needs to determine, which “god” we are speaking about. Is it the “god of the philosophers” whose theodicies could be applied to many religions? For a Unitarian conception of god is riddled with many problems that even Aristotle noticed thousands of years ago. If Christians are to give an answer to the problem of evil, it must be from a distinctly Christian conception of God, the Trinity. Without it, we miss out on everything that distinguishes it from other religions and cuts us off from what only the Trinity has to offer. This is fount from which all great Christian doctrines pour forth, and it is also where we will find a solution to the problem of evil.

Summary of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 is sets a foundation for the whole paper, and the general endeavor for any future additions. It will survey the different versions of the problem of evil, and the methodology generally used to address it. It will also draw from Wolterstorff's work, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, to understand how better to go about dismantling objections to the problem of evil. This includes the background beliefs which might persuade a reader of an answer on a particular topic because, for example, they may be a Western reader. It will also review literature dealing specifically with the Trinity and the problem of evil and the gap therein.

Summary of Chapter 3

The arguments in chapter 3, if valid, will lend credibility to the rest of the paper and the resources I will draw out later from the Trinity. Interestingly, a Unitarian god would not exist in any relationship by himself. For all eternity he would be alone. Presumably he would have no reason to create, especially creatures with free will.⁶ For this kind of god would not have much, if anything to do with fellowship. That is to say unless he was lonely or desired human worship, in which case this would indicate need. If he has needs, then he certainly is not that god-ish at all. This kind of god does not seem very far from the Greek myths. He certainly could not offer love, or even be love in popular irreligious opinion.⁷ For if he was Unitarian, then whom was he loving or good to before creation? He may have the capacity to love but his essential nature would be far from it.

Summary of Chapter 4

Chapter four will dive into 'the eternal dance' of the Trinity: it is three in one ontological nature. The essential nature of the Trinity is what completely differentiates itself from other

⁶ Ibid. 20

⁷ Those who are "self-described" as "spiritual" only believing in a "god of Love," if there is one that is.

religions. Here God is three persons, yet one nature. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He lives in a communal relationship of love with one another.⁸ This pure love the divine persons have for each other is “unconditionally giving in its character”⁹ also “they receive each other in the same manner...it is a radical giving and receiving. It is perfect communion and union.”¹⁰ Here resides love boundless and unending. All of this is simplified in how John famously expresses it, “God is love.”¹¹

Summary of Chapter 5

Chapter 5 will address the topic of evil in regards to Hell. However, it will do so using Hell as an Eschatological resource for Christianity to answer the problem of evil. This is done by viewing Hell through the lens of the Trinity, which examines explicit Trinitarian themes such as love, freedom, and God being tri-personal. It is argued that God would not be a God of love if he did not uphold justice for the oppressed, respect human freedom of choice, and uphold justice for each member of the Godhead.

iii. Research Sources

Reading will compile the bulk of research done. This will be primarily done at Liberty University Graduate School and their Library. Research will focus on theological and philosophical contributions to the problem of evil, the Trinity, and Christianity. This will include: books, dictionaries, monographs, and dissertations.

iv. Results

This paper will hope to demonstrate the richness of Christian Theism’s ability to address the problem of evil in the world. It will accomplish three goals to do this. First, this paper will

⁸ Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 32

⁹ Richard Plass and James Cofield, *The Relational Soul: Moving from False Self to Deep Connection* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 12

¹⁰ Ibid. 13

¹¹ 1 John 4:16

make a case through abduction, to explicitly undermine the standard theistic approach showing that a Unitarian conception of God does not contain the adequate explanatory power to generate an aesthetically pleasing or adequate response to the problem of evil. Recent philosophers claim that this conception should be passed over, but do not say why, except to remain true to one's convictions.¹² Second, this paper will take the Trinity as its starting point for the problem of evil. It will be demonstrated that the trinity has unique resources because it alone is a "God of love." Because of this, it has greater explanatory power for the kinds of responses to the problem of evil. Third, this will not only examine why a "God of love" allows certain evils, but discuss how he responds to evil, in a preventative and active sense. While skeptics may still disregard God on account of evil, this paper hopes to assert a defense in such a way that is aesthetically pleasing, and draws the person to, as Pascal said, "wish it were true."

¹² Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous evils and the goodness of God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000) 3- 4.

CHAPTER II: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

A. Introduction

The problem of evil has existed since the very first man. It is relentless. Just when life seem to be normal and peace seems to be right around the corner, evil rears its gaze upon the communities, families, and lives held dear. While many may not be able to give a solid definition, most can spot evil when they see it. Regardless of the century, or the progress that has been made, it has been there and it doesn't seem to be going away. All religions have tried to give an explanation for it. All philosophies have encountered it and tried to make sense of it. Evil is an everyday problem; the immensity of which is broadcasted throughout the media. Christianity in particular, has had many who challenge the validity of its claims because of this particular stumbling block.

i. The Problem of Evil Defined.

Most scholars would differentiate between three main versions of the problem of evil. The three are the logical, evidential, and gratuitous.¹³ In general, all three revolve around the existence of evil with the compatibility of belief in a good God. The logical version asserts that it is logically impossible the two go together. It is an explicit contradiction. The evidential version revolves on probability. It asserts that belief in God is unlikely given evil. The third, the gratuitous version, asserts that the existence of a good God is incompatible with the sorts and amounts of evil. The emphasis here is on the sheer magnitude of evil in the world.

Historically, David Hume has presented the problem of evil in its logical format, arguing that the presence of evil leads one to assert that God is not all loving, or all powerful. He says, "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing?"

¹³ Chad V. Meister and James K. Dew, *God and evil: the case for God in a world filled with pain* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013) Introduction.

then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?"¹⁴ Both of these claims would suggest He would do whatever it takes to eradicate the presence of evil in the lives of those whom he loves and would have the power to do so. Therefore, a possibility of an all-loving and all-powerful God is illogical. Tracing a heritage from David Hume, J.L. Mackie gives what was one of the most impressive versions of the logical problem. He says,

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three.¹⁵

However, by in large, the logical problem has been seen as debunked, thanks to Alvin Plantinga, and his free will defense. Even Mackie himself would later come to accept that compatibility between the two.

What ties all three versions together is an existential aspect to them. Everyone feels the tension in the problem. This gives it a *prima facie* feel of objection to belief in God. Rightly so, it is on the face of it a shock. Each of these problems have received extensive attention, and good treatment one might add. This would be considered the religious or existential problem of evil. James K. Dew Jr. says, "the religious problem of evil refers to the way instances of evil cause emotional difficulty for belief in God."¹⁶ While Hume's version is good for understanding the problem it doesn't do justice to the weight of it. The atheist Croatian philosopher Slavoj Zizek articulates the problem in a somewhat better way as to grasp the true force behind evil. He says,

The key question about religion today is can all religious experiences and practices effectively be contained within the dimension of the conjunction of truth and meaning? The best starting point for such a line of inquiry is the point at which religion itself faces

¹⁴ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pt. X, pp. 88.

¹⁵ J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in *The Philosophy of religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 92

¹⁶ Chad V. Meister and James K. Dew, *God and evil: the case for God in a world filled with pain* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013) 27.

a trauma, a shock which dissolves the link between truth and meaning, a truth so traumatic that it resists being integrated into the universe of meaning. Every theologian sooner or later faces the problem of how to reconcile the existence of God with the fact of the Shoah or some similar excessive evil: how are we to reconcile the existence of an omnipotent any good God with the terrifying suffering of millions of innocents...?¹⁷

This description puts the problem in a perspective that is felt. In asking how the two are compatible, one is asking for an answer. How does God handle evil? What does he do, if anything? He may allow or permit evil to function as a means to some end as many theodicies have suggested (greater good, soul making, etc.), and certainly they are necessary for a holistic response, but is God himself active in the problem of evil? Later Žižek says, "It is at the same time only theology that can provide the frame enabling us to somehow approach the scope of the catastrophe--the fiasco of God is still with the fiasco of God."¹⁸ It is more theology, not less, that is needed to give an explanation for the problem of evil.

ii. Defining Terms

Broadly, there are two types of responses to the problem of evil. The first, a theodicy, is an attempt "to demonstrate that for every evil exists, there is a morally sufficient reason for Gods allowing it to exist." The second is a defense which, "is an attempt to show that there is no logical incompatibility between the existence of evil and the existence of God."¹⁹ This paper treads the line between theodicy and defense like a gymnast crossing a tightrope over the Grand Canyon. This is somewhat intentional. It will rely heavily on specifically Christian themes and doctrines which is usually a part of theodicies. They also attempt to explain all evil, and God's reason for allowing them. However, this is a defense in that it may not be the answer to the problem of evil, or what God has in mind. This *could be* what God does in repose to the

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek and Boris Gunjević, *God in pain: inversions of Apocalypse* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012) 155.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 158.

¹⁹ Chad V. Meister and James K. Dew, *God and evil: the case for God in a world filled with pain* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013) 9.

existence of evil. Furthermore, it is not the last word, but a partial one. In other words, it is not definitive. It does not take a stance, but suggests that this is what could be. So overall it is a highly informed Christian defense, if you will. For example, the existence of hell and God as loving is often taken as incompatible, yet because God is a trinity there are certain conceptual resources specific to him that allows this not to be so.

The term is difficult to define, at least, specifically. It can be abuse, harm, destruction, cancer, something as it should not be. Something that takes a way life, instead of giving it. Yet it is more than that. To help distinguish types of evil, philosophers have distinguished between moral and natural evil. Moral Evil is usually any action with mal intent. Natural evil is usually a cataclysmic event that causes destruction and/or takes away life. However, this isn't an exact definition of evil itself. This is not altogether uncommon even for philosophers. Even, Alvin Plantinga leaves out a definition of evil in his treatment of the subject, which seems right. Susan Neiman, author of *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, after cataloging so many views on evil still comes to the same agreement.²⁰ Evil is easier spotted than a definition given. He prefers to do the former by recalling literary portions on the matter rather than philosophical.

Yet, a definition does seem in order. The church father, St. Augustine, defined evil as a privation of good.²¹ Many have likewise followed in his footsteps. Evil is not a substance in and of itself, but a corruption of something good. Cancer is 'evil' because it is a corruption of life. Murder is 'evil' because it is a twisting of desires and going against the normal human order and moral norms that people should follow. Philosopher Jeremy Evans defines the privation of good

²⁰ Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015) Introduction.

²¹ Augustine, *The Confessions* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012) Book 3.

as, “the corruption or twisting of a created thing’s essence or substance.”²² Evil is only able to be itself to the extent that it takes from the good. It is a parasite.

Going back to the distinction between moral and natural evil, he says moral evil “occurs when an objective moral requirement is vitiated through the intentions (free will) of a person, the usual result of which is the suffering of other.”²³ This definition emphasizes both intention and content of the action. Natural evil, on the other hand, is usually taken to include and be characterized as, “violent, natural states of affairs that produce human suffering, and human suffering that is not connected to one’s personal misconduct is wrong.”²⁴ The emphasis here is on nature producing human suffering. Evans notes, and makes the case for a better understanding and contours of natural evil, in connection with free will and guilty/innocent.

iii. A Note On Methodology

On discussing actual religions: this paper will differentiate between two paths: theory and reality. Let the reader not mistake what is intended. The first will be used to show what is likely. For instance, how a Unitarian deity might act, and what might be against his own nature. While discussing theory this is in no way making claims on what other monotheistic religions do believe. However, at certain times when appropriate and to further demonstrate these claims, actual religious conceptions of God such as Islam’s Allah, will be discussed. Doing this will show how certain ideas in theory have come to play out in reality of religious belief. Mentioning actual religions will help because if God were Unitarian he would probably act in similar ways that Allah does.

On undermining “Standard Theism,” to be clear, this is skirting the line close to comfort

²² Jeremy A. Evans, *The Problem of Evil: The Challenge to Essential Christian Beliefs* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 1.

²³ *Ibid*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

for some people. Some would think this way of arguing is getting awfully close to being used against Christianity itself. That it may do more harm than good in trying to be polemical. There is certainly some concern that is warranted. Yet, this enterprise should be seen as worth the risk. In *Interstellar*, when they plan to use the planets gravitational field to sling shot them around and thus generating enough speed to help them, it seems risky yet is the only solution moving forward.

iv. Theorizing on The Problem of Evil

One should not simply waltz in and start talking about the problem of evil. Although progress could be made that way, it would be to disregard the context within which the problem is concerned. Instead, it should first progress with how one theorizes about the problem in mind. What does this exactly look like? In the pivotal book, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff analyzes three components central to any concept of theorizing and “theory weighing”: data beliefs, data-background beliefs, and control Beliefs.²⁵

In the purist of truth, an inquirer will theorize about the scope of a problem or a certain set of entities in question, called the data. This could be an astrological phenomenon or anything else experienced. However, in theorizing about the data, there is host of unseen guides. As Wolterstorff says, “In weighing a theory one always brings along the whole complex of one's beliefs. One does not strip away all but those beliefs functioning as data relative to the theory being weighed. On the contrary, one remains cloaked in the belief—aware of some strands, unaware of most.”²⁶ What is this ‘invisibility cloak’ the inquirer is shrouded in? This cloak is made of Data-Background beliefs, and Control Beliefs, which can determine how he might respond to the data, whether in theorizing, rejecting, or accepting certain ideas.

²⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 69.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 66.

What are data-background beliefs? They are the beliefs that are taken for granted, usually unconsciously, that often determine whether one accepts or rejects certain data. For instance, everyone usually assumes their visual senses are working reliably without any thought to it. But things do get more complicated than this. Take culture for instance, a swimming pool of thought that we wade in every day, and were raised in and so have no clue as to how things could be different. Yet, this may determine if one is more idealistic, or collectivistic. Or, if raised in a western nation you might take freedom as a self-evident value, where no one else has the right to obstruct your choices. This is contrasted by someone who might be raised in an authoritarian or ancestral-worship culture, where parents or authorities have more say in their life. Good philosophy should even question our culture that is often taken for granted. Wolterstorff says, “for the weighing of a given theory at a given time all such data background theories are taken as unproblematic. The data background theories are, on that occasion, not subjected to weighing.”²⁷

The second part of the cloak are control beliefs. Not surprisingly from their name they help determine how we react to different theories about the data itself. Wolterstorff says, “Everyone who weighs a theory has certain beliefs as to what constitutes an acceptable sort of theory on the matter under consideration.”²⁸ These are the aforementioned beliefs in question. These beliefs function in two ways: 1. They lead one to either reject certain theories because they do not line up with existing beliefs, or 2. They lead one to accept or devise certain theories that are consistent with control beliefs. In essence, control beliefs are the plumb line by which we measure certain theories.

²⁷Ibid, 67.

²⁸Ibid, 67.

It is Wolterstorff's main point that the Christian scholar's control beliefs should be his religious beliefs. These beliefs should be the determining factor in weighing and devising certain theories to explain data. For instance, he says these incorporate,

the belief that one of the fundamental things that makes human beings unique among earthlings lies in fact that they and they alone have been "graced" by God with responsibilities. This in turn, presupposes that man was created in such a way as to be free to carry out or not to carry out those responsibilities...these propositions...ought to function as control over the sorts of theories which we are willing to accept.²⁹

The narrative of Christianity should critically influence philosophy. In his, "*Advice to Christian Philosophers*," Alvin Plantinga argues similarly for the centrality of Christianity in their work. He says, "We must therefore pursue our projects with integrity, independence, and Christian boldness."³⁰ He illustrates this endeavor in his own Reformed Epistemology. Yet this does not mean the Christian philosopher is chained in a negative sense. Instead he is freed, it is exhilarating. As philosopher Craig Bartholomew says, "Christian philosophy is not for hacks. It requires competence, imagination, and courage."³¹ In solidarity with Plantinga and Wolterstorff, Adams also rings with the same enthusiasm, "I challenge us to show the courage of our convictions by drawing on the wider resources of our religion to explain how an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God could both permit and defeat even horrendous evils."³²

So what exactly does this in turn look like for the current project? It means it takes a few things into consideration based on Wolterstorff's method. First is the common evidential problem and existential threat to everyone, the problem evil. This is the data to which the theories will be aimed at. Yet what is commonly taken for granted, but it seems should not be, is

²⁹Ibid, 77.

³⁰ Alvin Plantinga, 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', Faith and Philosophy, Vol. 1, No. 3, July 1984, 274.

³¹ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, A division of Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 220.

³² Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 4.

culture. One must take care to address the surrounding context to himself as well. The problem of evil does not happen in a vacuum and so it makes sense that we should examine the context by which a certain group evaluates the problem of evil. This takes into account not only how the culture has changed but the theology of that culture has changed. Last, as is obvious, is to take into account for control beliefs, the fact that a personal God exists. But this is not just any concept of God or a sheer Anselmian ‘greatest conceivable being.’ This project will take a robust orthodox view of God as a Trinity, within the biblical narrative. For instance, the Christian conception of God as Father, divorced from the Christian narrative, will ultimately end in disbelief or distrust.

v. Understanding the Role of Background Beliefs, Culture, and Theodicy

How should one approach the background beliefs that play into theory appreciation or rejection? It first starts with observation. How one got to a place is just as important as to why one is there, and is just as important to make sense of where exactly one is.

It is no surprise that philosophy, worldviews, and thinking happen within a historical vacuum. This includes what’s widely regarded as true, as in science and history. But it also is much deeper in that it is how one is, without even knowing it. This is largely a part of what culture means. This context can predispose people to think and act in certain ways. For example, in *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah, shows how modern America is now in an “expressive” or hyper individualist age.³³ The west has moved beyond modernity. This will directly impact what sort of answer to the problem of evil has enough power to makes sense of it

³³ This has largely determined how Americans now pursue relationships and the extent that they can even keep them. It has become harder to stay in a committed relationship when one is succumbed to pursuing his or her interests above everything else. NYU sociologist Eric Klinenberg’s research on this interrelated issue can be found in and was published in partnership within, Aziz Ansari’s, book *Modern Romance*.

all.³⁴

Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*, considers two fascinating things: The history concerning the impact of the problem of evil and the growing secular culture in western societies. While the modern man might balk at the notion of God being compatible with evil, impeding him at the front of any belief in the supernatural, it might surprise him that this has not always been the case. The philosophical problem of evil can at least be dated back to Plato in the *Timaeus*, yet it did not carry the same weight as it does today.

Pondering on the spiritual state of affairs, Taylor says that only 500 years separates the cognitive disposition in which would be considered impossible to believe in God and impossible *not* to believe in God. He attributes this to the rise of the “immanent frame” or a naturalistic world where there is only the rational.³⁵ No supernatural plane exists, only what is here and tangible. Stemming from the enlightenment, everything began to focus on reason and what the intellect could or could not prove on its own. This new “buffered self” emerged as its own God, determining its own fate and impervious to factors “out there.” However, this change did not completely erode any belief in God. What was left was an elitist version of a deistic god.

Transcendent yet un-immanent, his only purpose was to begin creation and keep things running

³⁴ Philosopher James K. A. Smith makes a provocative assertion. If we adopt a modernistic Cartesian view of man, that he is primarily a thinking thing, then what he needs in life is more knowledge to grow. Transferring that into the discussion on the problem of evil, then what we would need to satisfy one’s woe’s is a “good enough” answer. Now “good enough” is vague and subjective, but the principle should remain. If one has an adequate answer, then the problem should go away. Well, it seems we have had a “good enough” answer in the problem of evil with Plantinga’s free will defense. Yet, most people disregard this answer and still remain against it. What Smith provocatively asserts is that we are not primarily thinking thing, a very modern conception. Instead, taking from Augustine, he challenges that we are primarily loving things. To be sure, this is a paradigm shift. We are still thinking things but are creatures ordered by habit and love. With this in mind on the discussion on evil, what do loving things need isn’t just adequate and logical answers but answers that woo our loves, that provoke within them passion. Pascal saw this as well, hinting at desire, when he wanted to at least make men wish the Gospel were true. So an answer to the problem of evil must include this dimension as well or it will not have much effect on the person. Smith writes, “such a telos works on us, not by convincing the intellect, but by allure.” One’s response to the problem of evil should lead others to at least say, “I may not agree with that, but if I were to believe, it would be in that kind of God.” James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: the spiritual power of habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), Chapter 2.

³⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 25.

smoothly along the way.³⁶ To contrast, man shifts to the center in Deism, while in Christianity God remains at the center. The self begins to reign supreme.³⁷

When the problem of evil and secularism intersected, backlash ensued against this deistic god. If He was good and for the benefit of mankind, how could He let evil happen? Concerning suffering, Timothy Keller says that it is “a much bigger problem for those with a residue of Christianity—with a belief in a distant God who exists for humanity’s benefit—than it was for a full blown orthodox faith not weakened by the immanent frame.”³⁸ If Christianity is true, when adherents depart from its teachings they will inevitably face problems in their framework for understanding things as a whole. This particularly includes reconciling God and evil. Now that the cultures “plausibility structures,” or what’s believable, have changed its crucial to understand them and take account of them when discussing the problem of evil. This includes an understanding of individualism, love, and God to begin with.

B. Examining the Literature on the Trinity and Evil

i. Plantinga’s Assumption

With the previous discussion in mind, was Alvin Plantinga wrong in *God, Freedom, and Evil*? That’s a pretty hefty question for one of the world’s greatest living philosophers. Not only that, but also he was the man who laid to rest the logical problem of evil. Plantinga is by no means wrong, but he did leave out something. To be fair, what he left out was unnecessary for

³⁶ Richard Tarnas says, “In contrast to the medieval Christian cosmos, which was not only created but continuously and directly governed by a personal and actively omnipotent God, the modern universe was an impersonal phenomenon, governed by natural laws, and understandable in exclusively physical and mathematical terms. God was now distantly removed from the physical universe, as creator and architect, and was now less a God of love, miracle, redemption, or historical intervention than a supreme intelligence and first cause, who established the material universe and immutable laws and then withdrew from activity.” As quoted in, B. Goudzwaard and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age: an archaeology of contemporary culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017) 34.

³⁷ The understandable but apt question, “couldn’t God have made a better world for me and you?” seems to showcase this change decisively.

³⁸ B. Goudzwaard and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age: an archaeology of contemporary culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017) 56.

his purposes. Curiously he leaves out one thing, the Trinity. In fact, he makes no mention of it whatsoever. In his introduction, he mentions that Christians and Muslims both worship ‘God.’ He says, "Of course these religions—theistic religions—differ among themselves as to how they conceive of God. The Christian tradition, for example, emphasizes God's love and benevolence; in the Moslem view, on the other hand, God has a somewhat more arbitrary character."³⁹ This does not seem just a difference of emphasis. Here he underscores the ontological distinction between the two by only saying that they differ in their conceptions, with one emphasizing God’s love while the other emphasizes a more arbitrary character. However, throughout the book he does make mention of a God of love, and the person of Jesus Christ. So are these distinctions just cursory? Are they only superficial? Does the Christian and Islamic conception of God have no bearing on the problem of evil, theoretical or practical? No, they are not the same. The two conceptions of God lead towards two drastically different outcomes, and by doing so, Plantinga unintentionally blurs the ontological identity of both the Trinity and Allah together.

ii. Lack of The Trinity

It seems that most of the work on the problem of evil, has been without recourse to God’s Trinitarian nature. This is not to be pedantic but to only point to a less researched area. To illustrate, listed are some of the top books on the Problem of Evil from mostly Christian authors in which a search was done to see how many times the word “Trinity” or “Trinitarian” appears. Those terms are helpful because they make explicit what is often implied implicitly (by speaking of the Father, the Son, or the Spirit.⁴⁰ Plantinga’s *God, Freedom, and Evil*: none. N. T. Wright’s *Evil and The Justice of God*: none. Numerous authors in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*:

³⁹Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 1.

⁴⁰ This is to ask how the metaphysics of the Trinity, not simply a benevolent nature, help to answer to problem of evil. Again, if the metaphysics of the Trinity don’t matter in the problem of evil, then almost any theodicy could be applied to another conception of God.

none. John Feinberg's *The Many Faces of Evil*: none. Peter Inwagen's *The Problem of Evil* mentions the Trinity in one spot in the notes section. Bruce Little's *God Why This Evil?* mentions the trinity eight times, but none have anything to do with theodicy. Chad Miester's *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain* mentions it twice, and briefly connects it with the moral character of God that values free relationships. *The Problem of Evil (Oxford Readings in Philosophy)* mentions the Trinity once in passing by Diogenes Allen. He brings it up toward the end of his essay with other specific Christian doctrines that should be utilized in the problem of evil, yet doesn't go into detail about that. Brian Davies' *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*: mentions the Trinity multiple times but only in connection with God's identity or nature and doesn't draw a connection the problem evil. This is not to be an exhaustive search but merely to show how infrequently it comes up in general writings about the problem of evil by Christian philosophers and theologians.

iii. A Hopeful Change in the Literature

However, bleak Christian resources are in reference to Trinitarian responses there are a few promising ones that rise. These seek, usually by way of theodicy to explain from a Trinitarian stance or resources deriving from the trinity the kinds and amounts of evils, or the problem in general.

The first is, Greg Boyd's *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy*. Here, Trinity is actually only mentioned in 6 spots. Surprisingly, despite the name, Satan is also brought up about just as much. While not advocating for a classical process theology position he inevitably seems to slip toward it in his reconstruction of it.

The second, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, by Marilyn Adams is one of the best books to incorporate a triune perspective in her work. It's an outstanding piece. Adams aims

at answer the gratuitous problem of evil, or the kinds labeled as “horrendous.” Yet she leans mostly on a Christocentric perspective instead of a fully orbbed triune perspective. Her book mentions the Trinity quiet frequently and identifies that the trinity, in particular the incarnation, gives significant recourses to the problem of evil. However, she mostly focuses on the Incarnation as the way to divine meaning making. Overall “Trinity” in about eight spots throughout the book. Regrettably, but understandably, she also claims universal salvation that many orthodox believers would have a hard time accepting scripturally. The German theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, whom this paper will take ideas from also claims universal salvation as well.

The Third is Jacob Friesenhahn’s, *The Trinity and Theodicy: The Trinitarian Theology of von Balthasar and the Problem of Evil*. Friesenhahn’s is distinctly and uniquely Trinitarian. In this work he reviews and critiques the most successful Christian responses to the problem of evil: Alvin Plantinga, John Hick, Eleonore Stump, and Marilyn Adams. Most are found unsatisfactory. He succumbs to some strange reasoning of “infinite distance” in the relations between the trinity. In his work, evil is flipped around into a somewhat good thing (not to ascribe to him a position he would take).

The fourth is Ronnie Campbell’s dissertation: *Mere Christian Theism and The Problem of Evil: Toward A Trinitarian Perichoretic Theodicy*. He presents a Trinitarian theodicy based on the perichoretic relationship of the trinity itself. He grounds three theodicies (free will, soul making, and *O’ Felix Cupla*) in the Trinity.⁴¹

As for differences, Campbell focuses on many other religious systems (i.e. pantheism), as

⁴¹ Humorously, we take on the same project, unknown to each other at the same time, and under the direction of the same professor. For integrity’s sake, here I shall make note that while we both take similar starting points and draw many of the same conclusions, we did so separately. Most of this paper, about 50 pages of it, was written in the spring semester of 2014 for a class, while his came out in 2015. I only say that lest someone accuse this of plagiarism. His work is a tome, and I’m highly impressed by it. I also am glad that someone else was making similar connections which gives me confidence that the lines of thinking I am pursuing are at least plausible.

they relate to the problem of evil. This paper focuses largely on different aspects as well. It does not focus on soul-making or the *O Felix Cupla*, but will focus on the free will defense, and that this can only be grounded in the theodicy as a polemical move. Furthermore, it will give considerable amount of attention to the Incarnation and the topic of the Afterlife.

iv. Remaining Protestant Orthodox

So Trinitarian responses to the problem of evil have been a relatively mixed bag so to speak. This paper attempts to stay orthodox, or make sense of (with some wiggle room), orthodox teachings. In the problem of evil, those who stay Trinitarian in their focus usually fall away from orthodox teachings in some sense. For Boyd, that is affirming a process view of God. For Moltmann and Adams that's affirming a universalist view of salvation. For Friesenhahn, His work also seems to entail universalism as well.⁴² Moltmann also lapses into panentheism. Others, might deny the problem of evil all together or conceptualize it away a good. Campbell thankfully remains orthodox yet does not interact with kinds of evils, but relegates himself to general theodicies.

What does it look like to remain orthodox? The current project tries to stay true to 1.) The Trinitarian conception of God, as omnibenevolent, omniscience, and omnipotent. Furthermore, He is the only and only true God (not that other religions are without some truth). Following this, 2.) Christ is seen as fully God, and fully man. Both natures are affirmed without discarding one. 3.) Universalism, or the belief that all will be saved, is denied. In opposition to universalism, Hell is regarded as a real option. An eternal view of Hell and Annihilationist view, are both

⁴² Nathan Mladin, "The Trinity and Theodicy: The Trinitarian Theology of von Balthasar and the Problem of Evil," Themelios, <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/review/the-trinity-and-theodicy-the-trinitarian-theology-of-von-balthasar-and-the->.

regarded as seemingly plausible options. But the former is taken in respect to this paper in order to tease out a more robust response instead of making things easy.

v. Summary

This paper aims to take Wolterstorff and Plantinga's call to Christian theorizing seriously and run with it. To tackle the problem of evil from a distinctly Christian view, particularly seeing what difference the Trinity would make in answering it. Treatments of difficult subjects, such as the problem of evil should come from a distinctly Christian reference point of view which is then a distinctly Trinitarian point of view. The Trinity has not been the foundation from which Christian philosophers have been building on. Whatever they have been, has not been adequate. What they have been building with remains to be seen.

CHAPTER III: NATURE OF A UNITARIAN GOD

A: Introduction: Inherent Problems with a distinctly Unitarian Conception of God

Philosopher John Hick is wrong when he says that all religions are essentially the same. When it comes down to the very basics, is everyone is not speaking about the same ultimate being, the “Real.”⁴³ Differences in the conception of the real are not merely cultural and specific to geo-political factors of the time. Which conception of God as a starting point does matter when dealing with the problem of evil.

This chapter will attempt to show that overall a Unitarian conception of God 1) does not contain an essence of love, 2) lacks explanatory power for what humanity experiences and 3) the effects of these two for the problem of evil, notably that it not only lacks essential resources for the problem of evil, but ultimately undermines itself.

Specifically, there are two ways a Unitarian God is deficient in general and specifically as a “God of love.” These ways will show that 1) a Unitarian’s nature would be better construed at power, instead of love. 2) The kinds of creatures we find, specifically humans containing free will, are not easily explained given a Unitarian God.

B. Identity of God as a Problematic

There is one issue in particular concerning how the problem of evil is handled, and it is a rather glaring one as well. Many intelligent philosophers and theologians have indeed done an amazing job of giving a defense or a theodicy to the skeptic. The logical problem of evil has now really ceased to exist thanks to Alvin Plantinga. Still, the majority miss something. What they miss revolves around the identity of God. Moreover, this problem of God is not only related to the topic of evil but also to all theological issues. “Insofar as the public debate includes any

⁴³ John Hick as quoted in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions?" in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: theological essays on culture and religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 53.

reference to God,” writes Leslie Newbigin, “the reference is certainly not to the Blessed Trinity.”⁴⁴ Instead he says, “The public image of God is Unitarian.”⁴⁵ *This* is the problem. In *The Trinity as Public Truth*, Newbigin makes the claim that in theology and dialogues the distinctly Christian idea of God as Trinity has taken backseat to this generalized and depersonalized view of God.

The decline in attention to the Trinity has been widespread, with only recently in the past decade a resurgence of literature on the subject. Newbigin writes that for quite some time the Trinity played no major role even in his theology.

“Everything,” writes Newbigin, “has to be rethought from the foundation upward.”⁴⁶ He calls for a renunciation of the generic ‘God’ that has been at the forefront of philosophizing and theology for far too long. Instead he argues that the Trinity should be front and center of our work.

Before getting into deep waters how is one to discuss identity? This can mean many things and be taken in numerous directions. Theologian philosopher Kevin Vanhoozer says, “‘Identity’ is, of course, susceptible of several meanings: numeric oneness, ontological sameness or permanence in time, and the personal identity of self-continuity.”⁴⁷ For the purposes of this paper, the terms *essence* and *nature* (in an ontological sense) will both be used to refer to the core of an agent’s being. The second part of identity is *character*. For the purposes of this paper it will be interpreted as who that agent is, whose actions are dependent upon his essence or core being. As Vanhoozer says, “Character pertains to those aspects of my existence that I am unable

⁴⁴ Leslie Newbigin, “The Trinity as Public Truth,” ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: theological essays on culture and religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions?” in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: theological essays on culture and religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 47.

to change or, as Ricoeur puts it, “Character is truly the ‘what’ of the ‘who.’”⁴⁸ Action flows from character.

Vanhoozer agrees with the dilemma Newbigin brings up. The common conception of God, generally speaking, does not have roots in Christianity. Vanhoozer differentiates between two types of identity. The first is *idem*, or sameness through time, while the second is *ipse*, denoting selfhood through time.⁴⁹ He explains how this relates to a Unitarian God,

What Jenson calls the Persistence of the Beginning kind of God I shall call the God of Idem-identity, identity under the sign of the Same. The God of the idem-identity is the philosophers’ God and is identified by uncovering the properties of “perfect being.” This “Hellenic” interpretation of god posits a timeless ground of Being above the temporal flux: an Unmoved Mover. This supreme Substance became the immutable God of classical theism. In Aristotle and the tradition of classical logic, identity is sameness, which is exclusive of otherness. The “Hellenic” interpretation of Being as an eternal self-same unity thus leads to a monistic ontology.⁵⁰

Vanhoozer’s point is a Unitarian God not only is different ontologically, but also isn’t revealed. By the latter he means that He is completely impersonal, unconnected to any narrative to reveal the character of God.

It is easy to see the identity of God in this role is an abstract one. The main attributes or “Omni” qualities, which God possesses are still ascribed to him in the argument. But “God” is still aloof. This conception of God is not too far from Aristotle’s “Prime Mover.”⁵¹ It is almost like a divine Artificial Intelligence, or as philosopher Craig Bartholomew says, “pure abstraction.”⁵² One can see how Greek and biblical categories are fused together. However, it is not without some benefit. It does help to make sense of the world, especially with regard to how

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 48.

⁵¹ In the *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Peter Angeles gives the following characteristics of the Mover: one, good, eternal, unchanging, immutable, immaterial, completely actualized, self-sufficient, the primary substance, the source of everything, and Divine Thought, to name a few. Peter Adam Angeles, *Dictionary of philosophy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 305-7.

⁵² Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: a systematic and narrative introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, A division of Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 53.

it came to be. But that does not help answer Leibniz question, “why there is something rather than nothing?”⁵³ Nor does it give purpose or meaning.

This conception of God may be due to desire for simplicity. It also may be to keep things from going to a place where the non-religious philosopher might think ludicrous or fanciful. But then it seems the same answers, could theoretically be applied to Allah or another monotheistic religion. Curiously the rise of this abstract God coincides with the rise in the potency or visceral nature of the problem of evil.

Again, philosophy and theology do not occur in a historical vacuum. Culture is crucial to the discussion on the identity of God. While many may not be religious and the number of “spiritual but not religious” or the “nones” (for: none of the above) is statistically growing,⁵⁴ there is one thing that many would still insist on. That is to say, they would probably say that whatever God is, He’s love at the very least. Yet, where does this idea come from? Why would love be the one thing to characterize a deity? Certainly that was not the picture we get in the Greek epics. At least Sisyphus would not think so.

This image of God, as an abstract principle of love, is so pervasive that it set off a major debate with the release of Rob Bell’s New York Times best seller *Love Wins*, over how a God of love would act in the relation to eternal destinies.⁵⁵ But before discussing how he would act, it needs to be examined whether a God could be love or what it would take to be love. This conception of God seems to be a kind and grandiose concept that would change the world filling everyone’s heart, but is it real? This idea is so common that one would assume that it was almost

⁵³ This is referring to the *ultimate* origin of things.

⁵⁴ Pew Research in James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: understanding and reaching the religiously unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014).

⁵⁵ Interestingly the word “Trinity” is not mentioned once in the whole book.

a self-evident truth. The next section tries to show that the concept of a “god of love’ is not something that is easy to come up with.

i. Argument 1: A Unitarian God is Not a God of Love

As discussed earlier there are certain characteristics that seem more likely of a Unitarian God than a Trinitarian God. These were given in that positive. He would be omnipotent, the “Almighty.” Being self-sufficient and ontologically independent, He also would not have any reason to create.⁵⁶ Yet when talking about God one can also speak in the negative. He is not finite, weak, or ignorant. Here, it will also be shown that at the core of who he is, is not love. The argument is as follows; God eternally exists necessarily by virtue of who he is. Creation is a finite contingent entity who has not existed eternally. There was a time when creation did not exist. If love is not construed as a general goodness and is instead seen as a self-giving action directed at another, then there was a time when God was not loving. Something that is essential to one’s essence is always present. Therefore, love is not his core identity. Or,

1¶ Perfect love is a commitment involving an action from subject to receiver, that is giving in nature.

2¶ God must be the original subject existing eternally.

⁵⁶ Now some may object that creation has existed eternally. One way philosophers have sought to answer this, notable the church father Origen, some ancient Greeks and some Muslim philosophers (to the latter’s political dismay) countered by suggesting that creation was eternal. The implications of which are acutely thought out by Muslim philosophers *al-Farabi* and *Ibn-Sina*, who held that creation must be eternally existent to account for this.⁵⁶ Jim McGinnis summarizes their thought, “So, for example, both...maintained that if God went from not creating to creating, that would entail a change in God, but if God changes in any way, then there must be some cause of that change. In that case, there would be some cause acting, upon the Cause of all causes, and so would fail to be perfect, necessary, and so on. More specifically, they argued that God must create either essentially or accidentally. Now, were anything to belong to God accidentally, there would be composition within God; however, there are good philosophical reasons for affirming the absolute simplicity of God. Consequently, should God create, He must do so essentially, but since God’s essence has existed eternally, they concluded that what flows or emanates from that essence, namely, the created order, must also be eternal.” (Roger Allen and Shawkat M. Toorawa, eds., *Islam: A Short Guide to the Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 55.).

Yet, this answer posits more difficulties than it answers. How is this creation existing eternally? Is it self-generated? Does this also mean that creation is also somewhat God since its eternal as well? This just leads one down a path with too many unanswered questions.

- 3¶ God is able to love creation.
- 4¶ Creation is everything distinct from God.
- 5¶ Creation has not existed eternally.
- 6¶ There was a time before creation when God was not loving creation.⁵⁷
- 7¶ Therefore, God's essence is not love.⁵⁸

Stated even simpler, If God was love, then who was he loving before creation?⁵⁹ As a Unitarian God he is not loving anything. Yet, if one were to change the conception of God to a Trinity, it works. In the Godhead, each person would love one another for eternity, with or without a creation.⁶⁰ Decades before Rob Bell came onto the scene, C. S. Lewis was there to correct him. Lewis says,

All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that 'God is love'. But they seem not to notice that the words 'God is love' have no real meaning unless God contains at

⁵⁷ Could God love himself in the reflexive sense before creation? Footnote 65 addresses this potential objection in greater detail. But for now suffice it to say that 1, the analogy seems to fail to apply to a divine being who already is self-sufficient so if he "loves himself" it has no similarity to what is commonly meant by the term. 2, my argument can be adjusted to include a divine self-love, and may even be made stronger given abduction. Such an argument may say something like, a non-relational God who only and perfectly loves himself would not make much sense to create creatures who would rebel against him, which is not something in his best interest. Self-love is epitomized by caring for oneself. Therefore, creating such creatures would not be a perfectly loving action towards himself.

⁵⁸ This isn't just an argument that would affect classical theism, it would also have an impact on Judaism, and Islam. Furthermore, these arguments, if valid, help guard against Christian heresies like modalism, and Adoptionism. Modalism is the belief according to the Father, Son, and Spirit, that "these three names do not refer to three individuals or three persons, but to the different ways or modes of acting of the one God." Essentially, God remains a Unitarian deity and thus falls prey to this argument. Adoptionism is the doctrine which holds that, "the Father and Son are indeed distinct. Jesus, who was a mere man but an exceptionally virtuous man, became God's (adopted) Son at his baptism." (Stephen Hildebrand, "The Trinity in the Anti-Nicene Fathers," in *The Oxford handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 100.) While, holding to a multiplicity of persons, this still falls prey to the argument from the stand point of time. God was at one time by himself, and here fails.

⁵⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; Harper Collins: 2001) 174-176.

⁶⁰ One might object, that because the Trinity is still "one God," doesn't that entail that he is still loving himself in the grand scheme of things? While it is true that the Trinity still upholds the Jewish Shema ("hear oh Isreal, the lord your God is one"), and orthodox Christianity holds that the trinity has the same essence or "ousia," the persons within the Trinity are still distinct. They are irreducible to the others. Nor is it one God with many "faces" as modalism would hold. Therefore, because these are distinctly real persons, there can exist a self-giving relationship between them. This is part of the paradox, contra contradiction, of the mystery that is the Trinity. This objection was raised by Shabir Ally, a Muslim apologist, in a debate with William Lane Craig. The debate can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n52BzWKLn9g>. The transcript can be found here: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/debate-the-concept-of-god-in-islam-and-christianity#ixzz4fVatSYcY>

least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love.⁶¹

Saint Anselm, the great medieval theologian, also finds the same to be true in his *Monologion*. Hypothetically, he says, “suppose that no creature existed, i.e. suppose that nothing else had ever existed, other than the supreme spirit. The Father and the Son would still love themselves and each other. It follows from this that the Love is nothing other than the supreme essence (i.e. what the Father and the Son are).”⁶²

Insightfully, Lewis cuts to the heart of the matter, “Of course, what these people mean when they say that God is love is often something quite different: they really mean ‘Love is God’.⁶³ Now, this may be true if one was to take on a pantheistic conception of God, but then there are a whole host of other problems. The point of this argument is simple, a Unitarian God’s essence is not love. What he actually would be remains to be seen.

a. Objection: God Could Still Be Considered Loving

This objection can have two distinct parts. The first is that God could still have the capacity to love before creation existed, as an accidental or contingent property. More precisely, it is a disposition to love, but remains unused. This counter argument does seem entirely plausible.⁶⁴ But this is not the claim being made. However, yes, He might be *able* to show love. But would he show love to people who rebel against him worship other gods instead?

Essence and attributes should not be confused. Saying God is triune is not saying that he is merely loving. It is instead saying that he *is* love. Love is a part of God’s essence. It is not

⁶¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952, Harper Collins: 2001), 174-176.

⁶² Anselm S. Canterbury, Brian Davies, and Gillian Rosemary Evans, *The Major Works*: (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 62.

⁶³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; Harper Collins: 2001) 174-176.

⁶⁴ Could a Unitarian God love the world? Could he really put the world before himself? Sure he could be nice to the world, rain blessings down on them, even delight in the world. But lifting humanity above himself is something that seems nonsensical to a God of power, especially if humanity is construed as sinful.

merely an attribute such as mercy or wrath. In fact, those two proceed out of the central core of a loving God.

Maybe one might agree and see that a Unitarian conception of God is not inherently loving or has an essence of love. But a skeptic might point out, that indeed, he could very well still have the ability to love. Love is not essential property but a dormant attribute, able to be expressed once the ‘other’ comes onto the scene. Then, this would not detract from him being the greatest of all beings. Yet, after some reflection it seems this wounds him pretty terribly.

The second part, a related notion, might be that he could still love himself. German Theologian Jürgen Moltmann concedes, “He would at most be capable of loving himself, but not of loving another as himself, as Aristotle puts it.”⁶⁵ This point could be accepted. Yet, taking a look at one’s life and others, this is never really taken as “love.”⁶⁶ Even if it is, it’s usually taken in the negative sense of Narcissus. However, this is when this example is included the notion of love is downgraded, or highly weakened. If love never was able to be about the other person, it’s doubtful we would even have the concept of love.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 23.

⁶⁶ This can also be differentiated from “self-interest.”

⁶⁷ Is “self-love” a viable option? One can try and redefine the word love, to include “self-love,” but in reality self-love seems to be a misnomer. Love is essentially relational and outward facing. It is giving in nature. To look to the Bible, Paul defines love in exactly this manner, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.” However, “love of one-self” is grouped in an entirely different, and sinful, category. 2 Timothy 3:2-7, “For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.” This group of examples is explicitly inward facing. Many may not want to accept these as the sole definitions since it comes from the bible.

Furthermore, Self-love fails to make analogical sense when applied to God. Self-love usually indicates with the human a need. There is a gap to be filled. There is something wrong that needs to be made right, or better. Yet with

However, “it’s not enough to think of love as a mere dispositional property, the disposition to love if some other person were to exist,” argues William Lane Craig.⁶⁸ He goes on,

God, being all sufficient he should have no need for self-love. This can be hilariously elucidated, when applied to the picture of someone getting to know a specific person in hopes of dating them. If they ask someone close to that person if he/she was very “loving,” and that person replied, “well, he loves himself,” that would be the end of that pursuit. While self-interest is good, in that one needs to be take care of themselves and protect themselves from others taking advantage of them, self-love is inherently turned inward in a negative sense. In some sense this objection comes from our modern notion of expressive individualism and our consumer culture that tells us life is about us and projects that upon God. Historically, this has simply been taken as selfishness. And if God were really essentially “self-loving” then it would seem even more reason to not create anything (argument 3) and especially creatures who would turn their backs on him (argument 4). No mom or dad would let their daughter date a man who was essentially “self-loving.”

In regards to recent scholarship on this issue Thomas Jay Oord reviews Keith Ward’s *Cosmic Christ*. If God could be considered Unitarian and loving in the sense that his divine self-love was understood in a robust enough way to still be considered a “god of love,” it would seem open and relational theists like Keith Ward and Thomas Jay Oord would readily accept it. However, that is not the case in the slightest. While they both wish to steer away from the Trinity as historically formulated as three persons and one substance, they have a hard time reimagining a Unitarian God as a God of love by himself. In his blog, Oord recognizes how the Trinity as a social being provides a simpler and more efficient explanation for God to be essentially loving. He says, “the social Trinity idea is attractive to those who, like me, want to say love is inherently relational and love is an essential attribute of God’s nature.” Oord looks to creation as a necessary act as an option to revive God being essentially loving, yet this has its obvious weaknesses. Ward also recognizes these flaws. Yet he says, “If God is a relational being characterized by love...that relation must be to non-divine persons, and not a sort of secret self-love.” As pointed out by Oord, he seems continually make God dependent on something besides himself. If he is dependent on something created, it seems that God is not independent, that he is deficient in himself. But how could God be imperfect? Shouldn’t God not have to rely on anything outside himself for his own perfection? In that same sentence Ward doesn’t even give a second thought to some “secret self-love.” While this reference is a jab at social Trinitarians, this would preclude a Unitarian God loving himself as well. Presumably this is out of the question too. As Oord records, Ward seems to go in circles trying to find something he could connect God’s love with necessarily.

Alternatively, Ward intuitively recognizes that a God of love would seem to lead to the possibility of creating other creatures (my thesis). He says “If God is essentially love...then some form of creation of others may indeed be a natural expression of the divine being.” He later says, “I do accept that God has actually expressed the divine being as agapistic love by the creation of finite persons.” It seems that both Oord and Ward have to strain themselves in trying to keep God essentially loving and relational, yet not socially Trinitarian. No matter how they arrange the pieces it seems they still fall into the same error. However, a God who is three persons in one being, while a mystery, provides the robust explanatory power needed for God as a loving and relational yet independent and self-sufficient being. All previous quotes are found in Thomas Oord’s article, *A Triune God Who Essentially Loves Creation*, <http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/triune-god-essentially-loves-others>.

In another blog post, Oord believes it makes better sense to say that God necessarily creates then being internally relational and loving, what he dubs the “social Trinity.” He faults it as seeming too tri-theistic, and not monotheistic enough. On Oord’s view, God is essentially relational because he has been eternally creating. Oord quotes Ward again explaining his view of God and love saying, “love may be God’s nature, but even supposing that such love entails that God must create an object for God to love, it seems obvious that this object must be genuinely other than God and need not exist everlastingly but only for a finite time.” Self-love is again passed over, in favor for a more “concrete” love. Ward believes this love must be to some other creature that is not God, in order for this love to be genuine. However, this would seem to make God dependent not only on creation in general but specifically other persons. Later it seems Oord proposes something similar to the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* to escape divine blame for evil. Again, this seems to be attempt after attempt, *ad nauseum*, to prop up a sinking ship. Previous quote from Thomas Oord’s article *The Triune God Everlastingly Creates, Relates, and Loves*, <http://thomasjayoord.com/index.php/blog/archives/triune-god-everlastingly-creates-creation-love>.

⁶⁸ An objection may be raised here in regards to other virtues like justice. Does the Trinity also uphold justice for each other regardless of creation? Craig says, “One could respond that justice, like love, is expressed

“Being loving is not merely the disposition to give oneself away to another if that other existed. Being loving involves actually giving oneself away to another. So this disposition cannot lie merely latent in God and never be actualized.”⁶⁹ If an engine is never put in a car, it might have the capability to run, but without an engine it never will. If this thought is taken into ‘possible worlds’ dialogue, then there could be a world which there are no creatures and God is then never loving. A disposition is only the starting point.

ii. Argument 2: A Unitarian God is not a Perfect Being

This second argument is similar in that it is based on much of the same line of thinking as the previous argument. However, where the previous one solely argued that a Unitarian God would not be a God of love, J. P. Moreland and Craig's thesis argues that because of this a Unitarian God would not be completely perfect and thus would not really be a viable conception of God. They argue,

God is by definition the greatest conceivable being. As the greatest conceivable being,⁷⁰ God must be perfect. Now a perfect being must be a loving being. For love is a moral perfection; it is better for a person to be loving rather than unloving. God therefore must be a perfectly loving being. Now it is of the very nature of love to give oneself away. Love reaches out to another person rather than centering wholly in oneself. So if God is perfectly loving by his very nature, he must be giving himself in love to another. But who is that other?... It belongs to God's very essence to love, but it does not belong to his essence to create... But God is eternally loving. So again created persons alone are insufficient to account for God's being perfectly loving. It therefore follows that the other to whom God's love is necessarily directed must be internal to God himself.⁷¹

between the persons of the Trinity. We mustn't think of justice as simply the punishment of sin, though that is required by justice. Justice is a broader concept than that. Justice requires that we treat other persons fairly, that we not show favoritism, that we treat other persons as ends in themselves rather than as means to some end. The persons of the Trinity exhibit all those virtues. It would be absurd to imagine the persons of the Trinity involved in favoritism or partiality in their relations with one another!" Craig, William Lane. "Love and Justice in the Trinity | Reasonable Faith." ReasonableFaith.org. <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/love-and-justice-in-the-trinity#ixzz4fYhuKUZg>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ This notion of the 'greatest conceivable being' locates its origin in western philosophy with St. Anselm. However, Muslim philosopher Al-Kindi (d. ca. 950) also produced a similar "perfect being ontology." Philosopher Jim McGinnis explains this theory that, "Were this completely perfect being not absolutely one, it would not be absolutely perfect, needing a cause to unify it." In other words, to be perfect, is to entail divine simplicity. Roger Allen, *Islam: a short guide to the faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2011), 54.

⁷¹ J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers

Ronnie Campbell simplifies their argument as:

- (1) God is by definition the greatest conceivable being.
 - (2) As the greatest conceivable being, God must be perfect.
 - (3) A perfect being must be a loving being.
 - (4) If God is perfectly loving by his very nature, he must be giving himself in love to another.
 - (5) The other cannot be a created person.
- Therefore,
- (6) The other to whom God's love is necessarily directed must be internal to God himself.⁷²

Again, if one is not careful, they might be swept up and see the same argument as before.

Yet, inspecting closely, it trades on different themes and allows for an additional conclusion.

This argument takes at its starting point this 'greatest being' theology. To be a perfect God, one must be the greatest conceivable being conceivable.⁷³ A perfect being would entail having love as an essential moral perfection. Essential in that it is not contingent upon other factors (i.e. created beings). Any God who isn't essentially loving, is not perfect. Therefore, any conception of God that isn't essentially loving is not a viable conception of God.⁷⁴

From both of these formalizations another conclusion may be drawn, that a Unitarian God is either not a complete God or perfect God. For, if a love is not within his core nature or he is not

Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 594-595.

⁷² Ronnie Campbell, "Mere Christian Theism and the Problem of Evil: Toward a Trinitarian Perichoretic Theodicy," PhD diss., Liberty University, 2015, abstract in, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1734861830?accountid=12085>, 220

⁷³ Obviously, this can be subjected to what exactly the greatest being would look like, in the specifics to be exact. Yet, as Anselm's reply to Gaunilo show, it's not just so simple as creating the greatest island.

⁷⁴ One my object, "Can the Trinity express mercy to itself? If it can't then is the Trinity essential merciful? Surely the greatest possible being would be merciful." This objection assumes an incorrect assumption about the nature of mercy as its own essential property. It should actually be understood as a subset of the essential property of love. While mercy is not essential, it itself is contingent. William lane Craig says, "I'd say that while love is an essential property of God, mercy is a contingent property of God, the way God's love expresses itself toward fallen creatures if they do exist. In the absence of any creatures, God is loving but not merciful." William Lane Craig, "Is Mercy an Essential Property of God? | Reasonable Faith," ReasonableFaith.org, July 24, 2016, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/is-mercy-an-essential-property-of-god#ixzz4fTmXITn9>.

perfectly loving than he lacks a perfection common to the greatest conceivable being. If he lacks what is common to the greatest conceivable being than he is not the greatest conceivable being. From argument 1, it has been established that he is not a “God of love.” From argument 2, it has been established that that because of this is he is not the greatest conceivable being. However, if one finds fault with argument 2 because it is inherently more dangerous in its claims, this is completely fine as the rest of the paper need only to rely on argument 1, showing that his essential nature is not love.

C. The Ontological Nature of a Unitarian God

If the previous arguments hold up and infer that the essence of a Unitarian God isn't love, one must find out what is His real essence. Before answering that question, a crucial distinction must be made between essence and nature. Essence, for purposes here can be vaguely defined as the core of a person's being. Essence is unchangeable. Nature on the other hand, flows out of one's essence. It helps to determine his character and how one would act.

There are several things that we can seasonably assume about a Unitarian God on a theoretical basis. From earlier, and the first, is that he would not be a “God of love.” The second is that he would exist as a solitary being for all eternity. He would always have been alone. Given these two things we could postulate that God's essence would be power. This would be more akin to the classical Greek conception, adopting Anselm notion of “the greatest conceivable being,” yet lacking the love and personalism of Judaism and Christianity. In *Dogmatics in Outline*, theologian Karl Barth argues that without love, he would only be power or might. God would simply exist as the "Almighty."⁷⁵

Renowned German theologian Jürgen Moltmann picks up on this theme in his *Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. He distinguishes between a Unitarian conception, what he calls

⁷⁵ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1959), 48.

“Monotheistic Monarchianism,” as opposed to Christianity’s Trinity. Moltmann scholar Richard Bauckham explains how this Unitarian conception appeared. He says, “such Christian monotheism occurs when either the Greek philosophical notion of God as supreme substance or the modern idealist concept of God as absolute subject is given priority over the Trinitarian differentiation in God.”⁷⁶ Again, there’s a blending of two different systems. A mistake easily made by most Christian philosophers through the centuries. Continuing on Moltmann says “The monotheistic God is ‘the Lord of the world.’ He is defined simply through his power of disposal over his property, not through personality and personal relationships. He really has no name – merely legal titles.”⁷⁷ This God is not father, nor brother, or love. He is only ruler.⁷⁸

Together Moltmann and Bauckham draw three consequences of “Monotheistic Monarchianism,” 1.) the incompatibility of divine rule and human freedom, 2.) human domination, and 3.) suppression of pluralism. The first will be addressed in the next section, while the others will be addressed later on.

If this God is depersonalized, as simply the creator or ruler, then one might find a concept similar to Islam. Even the very name, Islam, means submission. Here, it’s about keeping the rules. There is no relationship with God in the personal sense.⁷⁹ Michael Reeves in *Delighting in the Trinity*, makes the point that while one can have gratitude for this, there is no way to love this

⁷⁶ “Jürgen Moltmann's “The Trinity and the Kingdom of God” and the question of pluralism,” in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: theological essays on culture and religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, by Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 157.

⁷⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 198.

⁷⁸ Perhaps this is the kind of God Nietzsche would worship, if any. If not, at least, Nietzsche is a good illustration of the true nature of power, and how it acts. Philosopher Donald Burt summarizes his thoughts, “only the weak seek others in society; the strong relish isolation, coming together only to accomplish a joint action furthering their individual will to power. Society stands in the way of the purposes of the “Superman” and is best done away with to clear the ground for the truly superior human being to develop.” Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: an introduction to Augustine’s practical philosophy* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 52.

⁷⁹ This is aside from certain small sects of Islam like Sufism.

kind of God, which makes impossible the command to "love the Lord my God."⁸⁰ However there are even more drastic ramifications if this is indeed the nature of a Unitarian God.

i. Argument 1: Lack of Explanatory Power for Creation

Based on the previous arguments, there seems no reason to create for the Unitarian God. Humans create because they are bored or need something, but God should not have either of those. Why would he create in the first place?⁸¹

1. By definition God, is without need and fully self-sufficient.
2. An ontologically independent God would not have reason to create.
3. If a God created, it would mean he lacked something (i.e. not maximally great).⁸²
4. Thus, a Unitarian God lacks the proper explanatory power for the very existence of creation.

This is already problematic and unsatisfying. But there's more. Creation is not any old created object. In creation we find living creatures, in particular we find creatures called humans that have a self-reflective awareness that leads them to having a certain freedom in creating and molding their own destinies apart from any other force determining their action. They are agents, with the freedom to choose.

ii. Argument 2: Lack of Explanatory Power for Free Will.

It seems common sense that much of the evil in this world is the result of free actions chosen by people to harm others. Plato himself gave a free will explanation (along with the

⁸⁰ Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 20.

⁸¹ Another related problem an impersonal Unitarian god would face is how to account with unity in diversity. Expressed in Francis Schaeffer's, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, he argues that having a totally impersonal single super being would not be able to create both diversity and harmony together, as well as to account for the personal nature of man.⁸¹ Schaeffer draws this concept out further in the rest of his book. As seen, the ontological nature of God lends quite a hand in determining how issues will play out. (Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 11.).

⁸² If he was Trinitarian, then that reason could be to spread his love. But based upon earlier arguments, this doesn't work.

essential chaos of the material world) to explain the existence of evil. Yet upon closer inspection the premise that humans have free will, driven by a self-reflective consciousness, does not seem too easily explained at all.⁸³ This would seem difficult given a general Unitarian view of God.

To provide an alternative, it seems entirely plausible that any God could create man without a conscious free-will. We would still be intelligent, yet be animalistic.⁸⁴ A good illustration of this are the humans in the first *Planet of the Apes*. Here they have taken the place of apes, they are animals in a very real sense. They would not be described as a “higher life form.” So this does not seem far off from what a God would create.

However, creatures with free will would seem to be problematic concerning two related areas: liberty and rebellion. If he was more concerned about submission instead of relationship, presumably he would not create creatures with free will to begin with. On this idea Moltmann comments,

Ernest Block once remarked that ‘Where is the great Lord the universe rain, there is no room for liberty, not even the liberty of the children of God, or the mystically democratic image of the kingdom which belonged to the millenarian hope.’ In saying this, Block is pointing on the one hand to the foundation of modern atheism, which started from the assumption that a God ruling in omnipotence and omniscience would make human liberty impossible. Consequently, the denial a God like this is the necessary presupposition for human liberty.⁸⁵

To be clear, Moltmann is differentiating between a God who is the sovereign king over all, whose rule is incompatible with anyone else’s. He later distinguishes between this kingdom of submission with the Trinity’s kingdom of servanthood.⁸⁶ Later Moltmann summarizes that, “an

⁸³ Atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel even thinks this is hard to explain for atheists as expressed in *Mind and Cosmos*.

⁸⁴ For another example think of Nebuchadnezzar, whom God cursed to walk like an animal for a while as punishment.

⁸⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 203.

⁸⁶ Objection from Determinism. Suppose someone might then dismiss free will, in favor for a hard determinism. This is totally fine, but they then must be prepared to accept a lack a personal responsibility to some degree, possibly completely. If there are no agents with moral freedom, then this would logically entail that those

immovable and apathetic God cannot be understood as the foundation of human freedom. An absolutist sovereign in heaven does not inspire liberty on earth.”⁸⁷

The presence of creatures who have the capacity to rebel against God would seem to steal from the worship He justly deserves. This is another level. It is not that it just seems unlikely, it is that it seems to go against everything this God is. Before creation, He shared nothing, but now is able to be defamed by those he created. This seems to take away the purpose of worship.⁸⁸ So the ability to rebel would contradict his nature of power. It is not the nature of power and authority to allow disobedience or tolerate dissent. However, now evil becomes a precarious subject.

Taking it all together,

1. God exists alone for all eternity, and has not needed anything (including relationships)
2. He is totally transcendent, not able to have a *personal* relationship with creatures
3. His essence is power instead of love, and so would not value free will
4. Therefore, it is improbable that a Unitarian God would value a genuinely reciprocal relationship with his creatures and so would not create creatures with free will.

If it is highly improbable that he would create creatures with free will, ipso facto, the standard theistic account loses the ability to ground a free will defense or theodicy. This is extremely important, because then this account loses the primary explanation for evil outside of God. If there is no free will then humans have no moral responsibility. This would be devastating

agents are not morally responsibly either. A bear who kills a salmon swimming upstream on its way to spawn with its family, isn't held as morally responsible for murder. It's just seen as nature. If there isn't moral freedom or responsibility, then there certainly can't be anything as ethereal as moral evil. Yet, that's just the point, there *is* moral evil. So determinism remains an unviable option.

⁸⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 218.

⁸⁸ Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 33.

enough, but this in turn also undermines the Goodness of this conception of God. If humans lack free will, yet evil remains a reality, it must be asked where it came from. The only other answer lies with this God himself. Thus, he bears the responsibility of evil. If evil originates from God, he can not be so good, perfect, or worthy of worship as Christians think.

In conclusion, not only is a God less likely to create creatures with free will, a Unitarian God also doesn't lend support to a free will hypothesis for solving the problem of evil. As the Supreme Being nothing can exist apart from himself. Therefore, everything would have its origin in him. So it seems then either he would be the author of evil or at least not be entirely good.⁸⁹ As Richard Bauckham says, "There is the problem that if God is absolute monarch, we are his slaves: the divine sovereignty leaves no room for human freedom."⁹⁰ So a Unitarian God lacks the explanatory power for creation and the kinds of creatures that exist with free will contradict his nature.⁹¹

a. Objection: Ockhamist freedom

Suppose a skeptic might posit that God is free to do anything, even outside his nature in an unrestricted sense, as William of Ockham proposed. If one were to start with this sort of radical freedom then a Unitarian God could theoretically do anything he likes, even create free will endowed humans. This does indeed carry a high degree of *a priori* plausibility. Yet, at what point does this become illogical? Could God go against his moral goodness? Could he act in a morally negative way and still be God? The 'New Atheists' might say, that's exactly their point! Although, they take a widely different view on the matter. However, the point seems to be that if God couldn't act in morally unacceptable ways, then there are contours on his actions. It would

⁸⁹ Reeves, *Ibid*, 57-58.

⁹⁰ "Jürgen Moltmann's "The Trinity and the Kingdom of God" and the question of pluralism," in *The Trinity in a pluralistic age: theological essays on culture and religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, by Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997) 155.

⁹¹ This is not saying it is impossible to account for evil in a Unitarian God, but difficult.

seem he could only act from within his own nature. If this is agreed, then it does not seem too far-fetched to say that a Unitarian God wouldn't act within his nature, and therefore it would be implausible to suggest that he would create, and create creatures with the capacity for free will to turn against him.

D. A Theologically Informed Ethical Dilemma

Socrates smoothly asks Euthyphro, "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" Ironically their discussion ends without much resolution. However, this issue is still alive and well in divine ethics on the nature of morality. It is an ontological question of where it is located. To preface this discussion, change the question to why. Socrates should ask, "why does God command the good?"

All of the previous discussion sizzles down to a serious ethical problem.⁹² This happens the exact moment one moves forward with theology, moving from deism to any major religious conception of God. If it is true, that a Unitarian God would not create creatures with free will and thus responsibility, then there remain two thorns. The first thorn is *unde malo*, or "whence this evil?" but also, and where the present dilemma is centered, how is God able to morally accept issuing divine judgement upon these agents who are not responsible for their actions.

A morally perfect God might center "good" on his nature, and issue his commands of "rightness" based on his knowledge of what is good for those creatures. So a morally perfect

⁹² Another problematic issue is salvation by works. On a Unitarian conception of God, is it really possible that those who rebel or sin against him ever have a chance of earning their salvation or working for it? This seems highly implausible, given the above exploration of his nature. These creatures were already supposed to be doing good works, or worshipping this God. Now they stop. Yet, if they try to make up for it by doing more good works aren't they really just doing what they should have been doing anyway? It seems there's never a way to catch up once you fall behind.

It seems that in Christianity, Christ as the scapegoat provides the only foundation for those who have sinned against God could ultimately be forgiven and shown grace. This allows God to forgive and extend salvation to anyone, regardless of wrongdoing. Yet would a Unitarian God have any resources or this sort of redemption? Animals sacrifice wouldn't wipe away the stain of sin, or rebellion. Human sacrifice wouldn't be able to cover anyone else's. A Unitarian God's transcendence prohibits him from reaching down and providing a sinless sacrifice or way to atone for humanity's sin. In fact, he can't help really at all. However, the trinity does.

God would care about morality. However, the probability that a Unitarian God create creatures with free will is very low, if not a contradiction. These two must fit together somehow. The presence of moral commands indicates an ability to obey/disobey those commands, and that a morally perfect God would hold creatures responsible for their decision to obey or not. Yet, if a Unitarian God would not create creatures with free will, yet he still holds them responsible as many of the world religions conceded then this is quite problematic.⁹³ So if the former discussion holds a Unitarian God is morally imperfect, for being the originator of evil, allowing the agents with no moral responsibility, responsible for acts over which they had no control, or (on the off chance he did) creating creatures with free will whom he knowingly would fail him and then have to judge them. The latter option emphasizing his love for creation, or lack thereof. Drawn out,

1. If a Unitarian God cares about obedience to the point of divine judgement, then why would he create creatures with free will who would ultimately dishonor him?
2. If a Unitarian God is loving, it seems he would not risk such punishment, and create humans without free will who obey by instinct.
3. A Unitarian God, per his transcendence and holiness is not interested in personal loving relationships with his creatures but only obedience, so that couldn't be a reason for bestowing free will. There's no other reason for giving free will.
4. Therefore, a Unitarian God would not create humans with moral responsibility, and does not care.⁹⁴ If one is then to deny free will, then God would be a still face the charge of

⁹³ Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity all hold to some sort of moral or divine judgement. This problem is even tricky for Christianity with a triune God.

⁹⁴ Indeed, the Qur'an does say that Allah determines everything, even those who go to hell and those who do not. In the case of Islam, if everything is determined and his will is supreme, then how can he also send people to Hell they weren't responsible for? Either 1.) Allah is responsible for evil, Or 2.) He sends people to Hell against their own desires for only doing his bidding.

being evil for arbitrarily sending people to hell. If divine judgement is removed, then how does God remain just?

In short, either a Unitarian God doesn't care about the eternal destinies of his creatures or he is responsible for evil (morally imperfect).

E. Conclusion

In response to the relativism of those like Hick who seek to blend religions together, or to step back from dogmatic claims about who God is in favor of generic conceptions of deity, this is only backfires. Jewish philosopher Lenn Goodman says, "When a spirit of generosity, no matter how sincerely, imputes equal truth and value to all outlets and lifeways, it does not respect, but only devalues the currency."⁹⁵⁹⁶ As far as the problem of evil is concerned, a Unitarian God is resource bankrupt. Staying in the framework of a generic conception of deity only impoverishes the debate.

If a Unitarian deity would not be a "God of love," his nature would look very differently. Theoretically his essence, the core of his being, would be one of power and authority. Hopefully it has now been adequately defended that, by way of abduction to the best explanation, 1.) in theory a Unitarian God have the capacity to love as an action toward creatures yet not exist ontologically with an essence whose central nature is love, or state more simply, would not be love at the core of his being. 2.) In practice, if one takes as true that A.) there is a God, and B.) that human beings possess free will, then it seems *prima facie* more likely that he would not be

⁹⁵ As quoted in, B. Goudzwaard and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age: an archaeology of contemporary culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017) 174.

⁹⁶ Kevin Vanhoozer has similar thoughts, "Ironically, however. Most theologians who have crossed the Rubicon reduce the particularity and otherness of the gospel's narrative identification of God to a bland, homogenous, unitive or "monistic" pluralism in high the differences in the Christian identification of God are subsumed, sometimes violently under the intolerant category of the Same." So in hopes of becoming inclusive, it has the ironic effect of being violently exclusivistic. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions?" in *The Trinity in Pluralistic Age: theological essays on culture and religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997) 50.

Unitarian. This is more reinforced if one also takes as true that this God will host some sort of judgement day or have some concept of Hell. Now it must be asked what does a God of love actually look like?

CHAPTER IV: TRINITY AS RESOLUTION

A. Introduction

If a Unitarian God is so susceptible to deconstruction in relation to the problem of evil, can the Trinity really offer anything different? Many have doubted that there's any practical significance of the Trinity at all. As the philosopher Immanuel Kant famously said,

The doctrine of the Trinity provides nothing, absolutely nothing, of practical value, even if one claims to understand it; still less when one is convinced that it far surpasses our understanding. It costs the student nothing to accept that we adore three or ten persons in the divinity...Furthermore this distinction offers absolutely no guidance for his conduct.⁹⁷

This chapter will rebut Kant's objection. It will argue that 1) because God is a Trinity, He is necessarily a God of love; 2) Because He is a God of love, the Trinity provides the best explanatory power for creation, as well as creatures with free will; 3) Because God is a God of love, this does give man guidance for his conduct; and 4) Given 1 and 2 then the conception of God as Trinity provides the greatest possible explanation for the problem of evil, because it provides the best understanding of creation and creatures with free will; thus enabling a free will response to the problem of evil.

B. The Ontological Nature of God

It is God being a trinity, that enable Him to be a "God of love." More precisely it is the structure of God's being which provides the necessary condition for it. God is the three persons. He exists necessarily so, so that it could not be otherwise. Because of this, each person of the Trinity has existed from eternity in a perfect relationship, making Him not only relational, and personal, but necessarily loving. However, these three persons are united as one. They share the same essence. This paradox allows Christians to affirm with Christ as he says the Shema in Mark 12:29, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'" But this is

⁹⁷ As quoted in Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002) 53.

not just important for religious continuity, but it is also important for divine simplicity and a host of other counter arguments such as Ockham's razor. Yet, for purposes of this argument, the former is what distinguishes the Trinity from other monotheistic conceptions of God; so that is where the emphasis will lie.

i. The Triune God is Three in One⁹⁸

When discussing the Trinity's ontology, or structure of being, one can slide into one of two errors: Tri-theism and modalism.⁹⁹ The former insisting that the Trinity is three distinct Gods, and the latter insisting that the Trinity is only one God who takes on three different modes or "masks." Yet, orthodox thought holds onto the paradox of God being three distinct persons while still sharing the same essence. What are these persons? Philosopher Peter Van Inwagen explains simply that, "persons are those things to which personal pronouns are applicable: a person can use the word "I" and be addressed as "thou.""¹⁰⁰ They each have their own identity. Theologian Thomas McCall says that the Trinitarian theologian should aim to be "consistent with the New Testament portrayal of divine persons, that is, as distinct centers of consciousness and will who exist together in loving relationships of mutual dependence."¹⁰¹ Each person of the trinity is separate from one another.¹⁰² McCall continues further that, "the divine persons are

⁹⁸ What model of the Trinity should one follow? McCall says either a modified Social Trinitarianism or Constitutional Trinitarianism. The former offered by Keith Yandell and the latter offered by Rea and Brower.

⁹⁹ Of course there are others, but these are the main two.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? philosophical and systematic theologians on the metaphysics of Trinitarian theology* (Eerdmans, 2010) 240.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁰² How can they be one at the same time? This is an excellent question that's been wrestled with by almost every major theologian. Its insufficient, but a few examples are helpful to catch this paradox, say $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 3$. Other interesting example is light being a wave and a particle at the same time. For a more human example, I think is that of conjoined twins. Particularly, twins that share the same body, but have different necks and heads. It's truly bewildering. This is not a perfect analogy by any means, but here we have one essence, yet, undeniably two different beings. They have two minds, and two distinct wills, yet their wills must come together almost always to do anything. When they don't, this could be attributed to selfishness (I would say sloth, as well, but then it seems both would feel that). This can be interest projected onto God, who might be considered to have three distinct centers of consciousness. However, for the Trinity, this is no problem mingling their wills to be in perfect harmony, for 1.) as they exist in a completely selfless relationship have no problem submitting to another, and 2.) are all three

irreducibly distinct; they are distinct agents who know and love one another. And they are so indivisibly united that their very identity is found in their relationships.”¹⁰³ To be clear, this is not one god acting at various times as different people, but three different persons acting at various times unique to that person, yet at the same time sharing their essence. Christ could say, “I and the Father are one,” yet the Father was distinct from and watched him suffer on the cross.

ii. The Oneness of God

In the Trinity, each member derives its being from one another in complete unity.¹⁰⁴ They are “each possessing fully the one undivided divine nature,” which is eternal.¹⁰⁵ They each have distinct roles and actions, yet work together in harmony for the same purpose. This “rich harmony,” theologian Bruce Ware says, “is heard from heaven as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each sing their respective parts of one glorious and intricately unified composition.”¹⁰⁶ In His high priestly prayer, Christ gives a glimpse into the inner relationship between Him and the Father when he says, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” Each person of the godhead is eternally equal, and there is as Millard Erickson says a, “symmetry of their relationships to one another in their essential status.”¹⁰⁷ Each participates in

omniscient, and so would presumably choose to do the same because they are all infinitely wise. Therefore, this solves the problem of three distinct minds, and three wills, yet also is one essence. For more info on conjoined twins, search Abigail and Brittany Hensel.

¹⁰³ Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?*, 241.

¹⁰⁴ Yet, while equal, there exists a hierarchy of status. The Father is over the Son, and the Son willingly submits, while the Spirit proceeds from both. There is unity and diversity present within the Godhead.

¹⁰⁵ Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 131.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 19.

¹⁰⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 86.

mutual subordination and service to the other. Timothy George adequately puts it, “the mystery of God’s unity is thus a unity of love.”¹⁰⁸

iii. The Nature of God

It has often been said, in a platonic fashion, that God’s essence is goodness. Or, at least some form of that, which equates God with the good. Christian Theologians would agree that God is the *True Good*, in an Augustinian manner, but would say his essence is holiness. Above all, God is holy. This seems almost non-descriptive though, because biblically speaking “holy” is usually just defined as “set apart.” This would lead one to think that this means God is totally other, distinct from everything else. While this is true, it leaves one in the same place as Immanuel Kant, not being able to know what God is really like.

It is important to ask though, why is God “set apart?” What is his holiness? Sure, He is set apart by possessing all the omni-attributes, and possess His own self existence. Yet, the Trinity is set apart, holy, and perfect, in part because He is a God of love. His essence, or nature, is love. More precisely its self-giving love, or *agape*. Instead of inward focused, it is always outward directed at the other. Each of the members of the Trinity have been existing in their self-giving unity for all eternity. This is the doctrine of *Perichoresis*.¹⁰⁹ As philosopher Stephen T. Davis explains, "this Greek word, first formal used in this context by John of Damascus, means co-inherence, mutual indwelling, interpenetrating, merging. It reaches towards the truth that the core of Gods inner being is the highest degree of self-giving love."¹¹⁰ He continues, “The Persons are fully open to each other, their actions *ad extra* are actions in common, they ‘see with

¹⁰⁸ Timothy George, ed., *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections On Christian Faith and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 125.

¹⁰⁹ Jurgen Moltmann also generously uses this doctrine of Perichoresis to explain not only the inner relationship of the Trinity but also how humans are united with God. Yet William Hasker and Thomas McCall both critique his use of this doctrine that it either does too little or extends too much.

¹¹⁰ Stephen T. Davis, As quoted in William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 215.

each other's eyes', the boundaries between them are transparent to each other, and each ontologically embraces the other."¹¹¹ It is this perichoresis that, as William Hasker says, allows "The three persons, while distinct in their actions" to be "necessarily united in their purposes and in their actions towards the world."¹¹² Perichoresis allows perfect unity in their will and actions. This is why some philosophers and theologians are lead to even say that God's very essence is love.¹¹³

So contrary to a Unitarian God, Jurgen Moltmann says,

If we see the Almighty in Trinitarian terms, he is not the archetype of the mighty ones of this world. He is the Father of the Christ who was crucified and raised for us. As the Father of Jesus Christ, he is almighty because he exposes himself to the experience of suffering, pain, helplessness and death. But what he *is* is not almighty power; what he *is* is love. It is his passionate, passible love that is almighty, nothing else.¹¹⁴

God makes manifest his essence through the central act of the passion of Christ upon the cross.

Known to himself for eternity, now his creatures can know the true grandeur of God's nature.

God is love, because He exists necessarily as three persons from eternity.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Stephen T. Davis, *Christian Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2006), 72.

¹¹² Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 257.

¹¹³ John Peckham gives numerous examples in his work *The Love of God*, one such is Martin Luther who said, "God is nothing else than love." However, Peckham is quick to assert that some deny this on the grounds that it would compromise divine simplicity and obscure other essential divine attributes, as held by Carl Henry. Peckham also takes a cautious stance on this issue, believing the biblical data to be indeterminate and that "a complete understanding of God's essence is beyond human cognizance." However, he is willing to say that it logically coheres that one can say based on 1 John 4 that all of God's actions must be "congruent with divine love," and thus "God's character is itself love, and God is essentially loving." As quoted in John Peckham, *The Love of God a Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 251.

¹¹⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 197.

¹¹⁵ Some are rightly tempted to object, that if a Unitarian god may not be a God of love, what about a God of two, four, or more persons? Does he necessarily have to be only three persons to be a God of love? This is a hard question. Philosopher Richard Swinburne wrestles with this exact question, giving an *a priori* argument for the Trinity based on love. Vlastimil Vohanka summarizes the basic premises of his argument as thus, "perfect love can only happen between at least two equals; perfect love can only happen between two equals if they co-operate in sharing their goods with yet another equal; any fourth or further divine individual cannot provide any additional kind of good; and any divine individual must be individuated by a characteristic causal relation." As quoted in Vlastimil Vohánka, "Swinburne's *A Priori* Case from Perfect Love for the trinity: A Reconstruction and the Obstacle of All-Perfection," *Pantheon* 8, no. 1 (2013): <https://sites.google.com/site/vvohanka/02-cv>, 77.

iv. The Trinity is a Morally Perfect Being

If God is the “greatest conceivable being,” then He would be perfect. In fact, He would be perfect in every possible way. One of these perfections, as Craig has pointed out, is morally perfect. It might be subjective as to whether being the greatest *conceivable* being would entail of one, two, or more persons. However, moral perfection consists in being perfectly loving.¹¹⁶ Because the Trinity has existed from eternity in a community of selfless relationships, He is essentially loving by nature. This not only establishes love as essential to God's nature, but also points to how and why this sort of God would instruct His creatures, aiming at the heart of the person and not just the actions.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, it would also shape how He interacts with his creation.

God has been loving for all eternity in relation to one another. This love is unlike the corrupted human counterpart, for it is mutually self-giving; it is totally other-oriented love. It

¹¹⁶ God being a God of love, would explain the nature of morality and his reason for giving moral commands. Because he is perfectly loving he inherently desires his creatures to do the same, knowing they are created in his image.

¹¹⁷ Some may object and say that the God of the Old Testament is surely not a God of love. But if we actually look closely the same emphasis on love of God and one's neighbor is present in the Old Testament. How else can one be sure that God's essential nature is love? If God is holy, what does holiness look like tangibly? In order to make His people like Himself, God gave them the Law, to become holy as He is holy. In its essence, holiness can be understood to be reflected in the Law. Then what is the sum total of the Law? Christ says,

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Both of these commandments were not new, but found in the Old Testament, (Deut 6:9 and Lev 19:18) indeed the whole Torah and Tanakh flow from these. They are the cornerstone of the Law. Elsewhere Christ says that the purpose of the Law is to do good, to save life and that the Sabbath was made for the man. Not the other way around. Anyone who would doubt the Old Testament should read Leviticus 19, which prescribes how the Israelites were to treat not only one another but also the sojourner, by loving him as one of their own. Even modern society could still benefit from the beautiful portrayal of the spotless justice it upholds. While the Old Testament takes severe criticism for judgment according to modern standards, Jesus is not without this trait either. There is dual symmetry between the two. Christ gives grace and mercy, yet upholds justice and pronounces judgment upon the religious and self-righteous. He speaks of Hell more than anyone else, and prophecies of the coming judgment. The Bible is complex and nuanced, it is situational and culturally defined yet timeless. However, the main message of the whole Bible remains consistently and constantly that God is love. It is evident that God's character is reflected in His Law, a total life-giving love. If all of His actions spring forth from his essential nature, and His nature is love, then it would be right to assume that all His actions arise from love.

seeks not its own, but that of the other. C.S. Lewis says, "His love is, as it were, bottomlessly selfless by very definition; it has everything to give, and nothing to receive."¹¹⁸ It is this nature of God that helps to make sense of the entire cosmos. Its order and existence are made explainable. Even more specifically, it helps to make sense of creatures with free will and the disorder of universe as well.

C. The Relationship of the Trinity to the Cosmos

God's relation to the world is either necessary or contingent. Richard Bauckham claims that God's relationship to the world is one of love. He says, "God relates to the world in love—both acting in love and suffering in love--and can do so because God's own being is an open fellowship of love."¹¹⁹ The Trinity relates to his creation in a unique way. It also provides a logical and persuasive explanation as to the reason for creation?

i. None of God's attributes are contingent on creation

While Moltmann has been a leader in advancing Trinitarian theology, McCall criticizes him for blurring the creator/creation distinction. On Moltmann's account, creation is absorbed into God.¹²⁰ As McCall says, "it is not that Moltmann and his fellow pantheists are somehow too Trinitarian -- it is that they are not Trinitarian enough."¹²¹ God's love and creativity, Moltmann holds, are dependent on creation existing. McCall counters by asserting that, "If God is trinity then God's own internal life consists in the loving communion shared between and among three divine persons, and God is not contingently relation at all but is necessarily so."¹²² In fact, none

¹¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 43.

¹¹⁹ "Jürgen Moltmann's "The Trinity and the Kingdom of God" and the question of pluralism," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: theological essays on culture and religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, by Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 158.

¹²⁰ To be totally clear, and contrary to McCall's criticisms, it doesn't seem clear that this is what Moltmann is explicitly arguing for, or takes this position out right. It may simply be an unintended consequence of fallacious logic that he used by accident.

¹²¹ Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?*, 247.

¹²² *Ibid*, 247.

of the Trinity's attributes are contingent on creation but exist necessarily in virtue of his inner communion. In further response to Moltmann's pantheism, Hasker says, "the love and relationality of God toward the creation are merely contingent— though even here, given that there is a creation, it is necessarily the case that God is related to it and love it."¹²³ The Trinity avails itself of the typical problems associated with any doctrine of creation, existing necessarily alongside of God, or emanating from within God, and in support of any attributes or to make up any suspected deficiency for the need to create in the first place.

ii. Creation Itself Was a Free Act.

Not only does the cosmos not exist necessarily (to explain itself or any God's attributes), but it itself was a free act of God himself, not imposed in any way. McCall says that because of the Trinity, "it becomes possible to say that he does not need the world, and so is able to will the existence of something else simply for its own sake." He continues, "Creation is the outcome God's love indeed, but of his unconstrained love. It is therefore not a necessary outcome of what God is, but is contingent."¹²⁴ Creation is simply a free act of God's will.¹²⁵ So the Trinity avoids all the pitfalls of explaining creation that a Unitarian god falls into, while offering a valid and illuminating account of its existence.

iii. The Trinity Allows for Other Autonomous Agents.

Taking for granted that humans have an autonomy of their own, how is one to make sense of this in a religious sense? By autonomy, this simply means the ability of man to make his own decisions that guides his actions, with no ultimate outside factor determining it. To illustrate with two types of free actions: the first, a simple everyday decisions and the second, a specific

¹²³ Ibid, 247.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 248.

¹²⁵ Colin Gunton says, "God, in creating the world, has no need to rely upon anything outside himself, so that creation is an act of divine sovereignty and freedom, and act of personal willing." Ibid, 247.

decision or freedom to go against God in any capacity. Broadly speaking, this means any decisions that would undermine His authority, slander Him, disobey His commands, and the like. The conventional concept of free will is most frequently demonstrated in the scenario where God's autonomous creation chooses obedience to God and the salvation offered by God through Jesus Christ. However, the fact that free will includes the choice to do evil and rebel against God most clearly demonstrates that the essence of the Trinity is good and relational. Why would a good, loving, relational God allow his creation to do evil to others, and to rebel against the Creator?¹²⁶ Recalling his earlier thoughts on evil in the *Confessions*, Augustine wrote about a similar curiosity,

If he wished now all of a sudden to create something, would not an almighty being have chosen to annihilate this evil matter and live by himself -- the perfect, true, sovereign, and infinite Good? Or, if it were not good that he who was good should not also be the framer and creator of what was good, then why was that evil matter not removed and brought to nothing, so that he might form good matter, out of which he might then create all things?¹²⁷

Evil is a polarizing concept that it usually forces one to either belief or unbelief with very little middle ground. This is why Plantinga's work was so groundbreaking. It shows that God could have a morally sufficient reason to allow evil, and that human freedom was an intrinsic good. But why is freedom so valuable? A God who is not inherently relational or loving lacks any foundation for finding such entities valuable to him.

However, a Trinitarian God, existing in an eternally loving relationship, would have a reason to create not only creatures in general, but specifically creatures with free will because He is interested in having relationships with his creatures. A relationship with those that choose Him.

¹²⁶ Put another way: Whereas the problem of free will usually is couched within the topic of salvation, it also is of interest in the reverse, that of rebellion against God. This type of freedom, given that God exists, may seem initially plausible. But after a brief meditation it doesn't seem as plausible as one might expect. Naturally, one first equates freedom with a good thing, and rightfully so. But once the perspective is shifted to the topic of evil as a result of that freedom then it becomes more interesting. Now the question is, why would a good God allow creatures to not only do evil to others, but also himself?

¹²⁷ Augustine et al., *The Confessions* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), Bk 7, Ch 5.

This loving, relational Trinity explains the purpose behind creation and free will. It is only this God that has the adequate explanatory power for such creatures. As Jürgen Moltmann eloquently says,

Only the passionate God, the God who suffers by virtue of his passion for people, calls the freedom of men and women to life. He gives human freedom its divine room for living. The triune God, who realizes the kingdom of his glory in a history of creation, liberation, and glorification, wants human freedom, justifies human freedom and unceasingly makes men and women free for freedom.”¹²⁸

The Trinity gives rise to free will instead of hard determinism, in both God’s being as well as his creatures.¹²⁹ In the most basic sense the Trinity gives freedom.¹³⁰

D. Explanatory Power: God Creates to Share Love

Thus the Triune nature of God provides a better explanation for creation and free will.

His relational and loving nature provides sufficient explanation for creating creatures that could rebel against him and the existence of evil. To rehearse, why would God create in the first place, assuming a Unitarian conception? The fallacy of a Unitarian God:

1. God is without need, and fully self-sufficient.
2. A God without need would not have reason to create.

¹²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 218.

¹²⁹ The Trinity is the only God who would essentially put up with back talk.

¹³⁰ But how does He give such creatures this autonomy? John Hick provides a compelling argument from epistemic distance, which also helps to answer divine hiddenness. He says, “In creating finite persons to love and be loved by Him God must endow them with a certain relative autonomy over against Himself. But how can a finite creature, dependent upon the infinite Creator for its very existence and for every power and quality of its being, possess any significant autonomy in relation to the Creator? The only way we can conceive is that suggested by our actual situation. God must set man at a distance from Himself, from which he can then voluntarily come to God. But how can anything be set at a distance from One who is infinite and omnipresent? Clearly spatial distance means nothing in this case. The kind of distance between God and man that would make room for a degree of human autonomy is epistemic distance. In other words, the reality and presence of God must not be borne in upon men in the coercive way in which their natural environment forces itself upon their attention. The world must be to man, to some extent at least, *etsi deus non daretur*, ‘as if there were no God.’ God must be a hidden deity, veiled by His creation. He must be knowable, but only by a mode of knowledge that involves a free personal response on man’s part, this response consisting in an uncompelled interpretive activity whereby we experience the world as mediating the divine presence. Such a need for a human faith-response will secure for man the only kind of freedom that is possible for him in relation to God, namely cognitive freedom, carrying with it the momentous possibility of being either aware or unaware of his Maker” as quoted in Campbell, 256.

3. Therefore, if God did create, it would mean he lacked something
4. There is creation, thus, a Unitarian God is not perfect.¹³¹

An alternative argument also forms,

1. God is without need, and fully self-sufficient.
2. God has no reason to create creatures with free will.
3. Creatures with free will can rebel against God and be disobedient.
4. Rebelling against God and being disobedient is sinful.
5. God does not tolerate sin.
6. Therefore, God would not create creatures with free will.
7. Creatures do have free will, therefore, either this God doesn't exist or he is morally deficient.

However, if the conception of God is changed to Trinitarian, then the outcome is completely different. The axiomatic Triune God:

1. A Trinitarian God, is without need, fully self- sufficient.
2. A God without need would not normally have any reason to create.
3. The essence of the Trinity is relational, outwardly loving.
4. There is creation and creatures with free will.
5. Therefore, the Trinity creates not out of need, but from the overflow of his love which allows for creatures with free will without contradicting his nature.

A Trinitarian God would be all sufficient and still have reason to create: out of the overflow and natural consequence of his love like a parental relationship. Just as a child is the natural result of the overflow of love between two people, likewise, creation is the result of the

¹³¹ One might object on the grounds of anti-realism, that creation is in the mind of God. Or they could object on grounds of pantheism, or pantheism. However, the latter two have still been shown to fail. Unfortunately, this argument, may not work with an anti-realist.

communal love between the Trinity. Yet this is not just for creation in general but creatures as well. As William Lane Craig writes,

The creation of the world is an act of self-condescension on God's part for the sake of his creatures. Alone in the self-sufficiency of his own being, enjoying the timeless fullness of the intra-trinitarian love relationships, God had no need for the creation of finite persons...He did this, not out of any deficit of himself his mode of existence, but in order that finite temporal creatures might come to share in the joy and blessedness of the inner life of God.¹³²

The most iconic scene inviting a glimpse into this relationship which is at the center of Christianity, is found in the gospel of Mark. He says, "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." This is the eternal dance, as the Church Fathers would say. A community of love, joy, and intimacy that makes the world revolve. It creates *ex nihilo*. From their being, flows all of life. In this dance, do "we live and move and have our being."¹³³

E. Conclusion

In conclusion, the ontological structure of the Trinity as a God of three persons, makes greater sense of and gives the greatest explanatory power for the data. It provides convincing argument for creation and the concept of free will. The trinity exists in a community of persons, relational and loving. This community is not characterized by self-absorption, but instead mutual giving of one to another. This is how John is able to say "God is love." This was not out of some idealistic expectation but rooted in deep theology. This sort of God gives the necessary and adequate explanatory power to understand the existence of creation, and within that, creatures with free will who have the autonomy to turn against God if he chooses it. This loving God who does not strike back when reviled, but extends pardon and mercy unconditionally. He extends

¹³² Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?*, 249.

¹³³ Acts 17:28

His love, His very *essence* to them. Humanity is invited into this dance. Because of the Son, God the Father through the Spirit adopts humanity. He becomes not only creator, but also Father and lover of His children.

CHAPTER V: ESCHATOLOGICAL RESOURCES: HELL

A. Introduction: Hell and The Trinity Are Reconciled.

A skeptic might point to Hell and say, “*here* is the epitome of evil. How can God be loving when he is the curator of an eternal genocide in his own back yard? Surely this is no loving God. He might penalize his creatures during their life on earth, but would take them into his loving arms after death. No, this God is a bloodthirsty tyrant”. Yet, this is not the God who is found in the Bible. He does not send innocent people to Hell. There’s plenty more to the story. There is a God of love, a reality of Hell, and both are compatible. The Triune nature of God has specific resources in regards to Hell. Actually, Christianity would not make sense without it. There are three ways which God’s nature will help make sense of Hell. 1) Contrary to skeptics, Hell is an act of justice precisely because he’s a God of love. 2) The relational character of God helps to understand that free will enables people to go to Hell. The first two propositions are two sides of the same coin which help to answer the problem of evil. 3) Lastly, and unique to a Triune God alone, is a theory of Inter-Trinitarian justice which allows him to be perfectly just and loving concerning the problem of Hell.

i. Hell as Justice: Hell is Reconciled with The God Because It’s for the Oppressed.

Usually, people are quick to question divine judgment. The proposed alternative, ushering everyone into salvation, seems much more loving. To this rational, is offered an alternative view, namely that if God did not hold people responsible for their actions then He could not be considered loving at all. If there is no divine justice, could it be said that God really cares for people? Furthermore, would that give evil the last laugh? On the severity of evil, theologian Fleming Rutledge says,

At stake... is a concept of hell that is adequate to the honor of the twentieth century and the looming terrors of the twenty first. The argument here is that it is necessary to posit the existence of a metaphorical hell in order to acknowledge the reality and power of radical evil— evil that does not yield to education, reason, or good intentions. Evil has an existence independent of the sum total of human misdeeds. The concept of Hell takes seriously the nature and scale of evil. Without a concept of hell, the Christian faith is sentimental and evasive, unable to stand up to the reality in this world. Without an unflinching grasp of the radical nature of evil, Christian faith would be little more than wishful thinking.¹³⁴

Perfect love takes evil seriously. It does so by upholding justice. This same intuition is also revealed in the objection to salvation for all who believe, namely that God could not allow a person like Hitler to go to Heaven, while a nice person went to Hell.¹³⁵ What's important here is the underlying notion of justice. God must be just if he is to be good at all. If God is real, and he is perfectly loving, then we would expect him to resolve all the injustices of the world, somehow. And justice is exactly what is found in the Christian doctrine of Hell. Therefore, Hell is not contradictory to a God of love, but makes complete sense given the nature of love and justice.

ii. Hell as Freedom: Hell Is Reconciled with The God Because It's the Outcome of Freedom.

The second premise is that free will and God's relational character can help make sense of Hell. Jerry Walls in his book, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*, explains that, "If freedom can account for the evil in this world, the same freedom may explain why hell exists in the next."¹³⁶ Three ideas need to be focused on: free will, the nature of love, and what it means to be with God. In the same way that God is omnipotent and would eradicate evil if He could, but can not because that would impede human freedom in this life, it may be the same in Hell.¹³⁷ Because

¹³⁴ Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 458.

¹³⁵ Hell does come with a paradox. But It isn't so much a paradox for God as it is for us because we want it both ways: to believe in a God that would accept everyone, yet at the same time to crush Hitler's of the world in judgement.

¹³⁶ Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory: rethinking the things that matter most* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), (kindle edition) 927-932.

¹³⁷ In pop culture there seems to be a caricature of Hell as the ultimate torture chamber. These images make the Spanish inquisition look like child's play. How could a God of love torture, let alone stand the torture of so many

free will is genuine, there is the very real possibility that humans could still resist God eternally. Quoting C. S. Lewis, Walls argues, that they are indeed in Hell by choice and are “in one sense, successful, rebels to the end.”¹³⁸

How is this possible though? Surely no one in Hell would stay there, some might say. There is only one other option, to reside eternally with God.¹³⁹ Heaven is not a place where one can easily miss God. Walls says, “the crowning feature of heaven is that God will live with us in intimate fellowship.”¹⁴⁰ In Heaven one is in the most beautiful and fulfilling relationship they could ever be in. This is the direct result of a triune relational God. Some might think that there could be the bliss of heaven without God, a place where one would never have to interact with him if they did not want to, yet still be able to enjoy all the pleasures of heaven. However, if a person could not accept His love in Heaven, maybe that person, in such a state, would dare not even think His gifts receivable knowing they came from the dreaded “Good God.”

people? Understanding the nature of Hell is just as important as understanding how God could allow someone there in the first place.

Again, Jerry Walls helps to make this complex issue easier to understand. Seeing where this punishment takes place sheds light on what it is like. There seem to be two differing accounts of where it shall take place. The first is depicted in Revelation 14, where it will be in the presence of God and the angels. The second seems to suggest “banishment from the presence of Christ.” Drawing from the Psalmist and Paul, Walls concludes that “people who may be “far” from God in terms of a meaningful, loving relationship are still “close” to him in the sense that he continually sustains them in existence” so those who are in “Revelation 14 are in the presence of the Lamb by virtue of the fact that he sustains them in existence.”¹³⁷ Metaphysically they are close, but relational are nowhere near him.

Why does this have anything to do with the nature of Hell? One cannot assume the lack of or different relationship to something will have no effect on the object. When the earth tilts on its axis, there is a lack of sunlight, which causes temperatures to plummet and the planet to freeze. In turn when, one is not aligned in a right relationship with God, they will inadvertently experience His love and glory differently. The same sun that warms one in the spring can give severe burns on the top of a snow capped mountain. The Puritans also said something along these lines, that the same sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay. Indeed, Walls observes that not only light but also fire is used in the Bible to describe God’s presence.¹³⁷ In Hell, the light of God’s glory and love does not become soft warm rays. Instead it burns, like the sunlight falling upon a vampire’s skin. All of this centers around the throne of God. Not only does Hell occur in the presence of the Lamb but also is where His followers receive the Water of Life. The love of God can either be experienced as infinite joy or excruciating pain. Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*, (kindle edition), 1169.

¹³⁸ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 130.

¹³⁹ Of course, there is also the annihilationist view.

¹⁴⁰ Walls, *Heaven Hell, and Purgatory*, (kindle edition) 974.

A person can only be in Heaven if he wants to be there. He can only be with God if he wants to. To be in Heaven is to love God, and the test of love is obedience. He knows the difference between obedience out of love for self, and that of true love, which is outward. Instead of really obeying God from the heart, one may obey out twisted love. They are still curved in on themselves, and only love themselves. Walls summarizes that, “Any who choose not to love God and invite him into their lives have chosen to exclude themselves from heaven by that very choice. Remember, heaven is the ultimate experience of “God with us.”¹⁴¹

All of this is precisely because there cannot be true love without freedom. While humans were created in the image of God, by nature they do not consist as ultimate love and goodness in and of themselves. In order for their love to remain genuine it must be freely chosen. The necessity of freedom, by default, opens the possibility of freely choosing to reject the love of God, thereby rejecting the ultimate reality of “God with us,” which is Heaven.¹⁴² Because God is love, He desires humanity’s love with all the might in the world but He cannot force it. This is why some can and will choose Hell over Him.

Because of free will, coupled with their fallen nature, it is possible for humanity to choose to forgo the love of God and remain in darkness. Like Sméagol in *Lord of the Rings*, who becomes Gollum, humans too become a darker version of themselves. Not being able to bear the light of day, they rather choose to live in the black heart of mountain, deep in the damp dreary caves.¹⁴³ Maybe as a non-Christian right now, they are still able to conceive of the possibility of choosing to turn to God if they wished. Yet later it might be like looking through the eyes of Gollum himself. Maybe, after death, there is no way one would ever want to choose the light and

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid, 980.

¹⁴³ Yes, Gollum does go out of the cave, but only when it was the only option, to go in search of the ring which eventually lead to his death. If he had recaptured his ring, he most likely would have gone straight back.

love of God, yet still *choose* it indeed. However, if one wanted to leave the pain, it would still only be from selfish love. On earth one bathes in the light of God, still enjoying the goodness and love that originate from Him. Yet when one is removed from His light, they could become blind in such a way that they could not even see Him if they tried--tragically the path of their own choosing.¹⁴⁴ As Aquinas says, "Therefore man's extreme unhappiness will consist in the fact that he is completely shut off from the divine light."¹⁴⁵

Whatever the case, it seems that after death circumstances will be different. The opportunity one has now will not be the same as later. The ability to see God's love and return it in kind may only be temporary.¹⁴⁶ This may be because the heart one has now, will *still* be the same. Presumably, those who love God will grow in their love for Him, and those who hate God

¹⁴⁴ C. S. Lewis shows how one's choices, a product of our free will, determine the nature of Hell. In *The Great Divorce*, he explains that Hell starts with us. As one lives their lives they make choices that either draw them closer to God or farther from him. The heart of those choices is what makes the difference. Someone can surely help all the orphans in the world, but do it for their own self-righteousness, dressed up in charity and piety. Lewis vividly portrays Hell as beginning, "With a grumbling mood... but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever like a machine. It is not a question of God "sending us" to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE hell unless it is nipped in the bud. C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 71. Removed from God's goodness, beauty, and light there is nothing else except humanity's own badness. They are not enslaved by God; *that* would be keeping those who did not love God in heaven. Sin is the master who terrorizes. God is the source of all goodness; removed from Him humanity has nothing. On earth one can be removed relationally from Him but still enjoy His gifts. In Hell they are removed from both. The torture experienced is being removed from God and all that He encompasses. However, Walls explains that this is not without its pleasures. Someone will probably leave a relationship due to the abuse by another, but many have expressed to stay in torture as long as it is *their* torture. Hell offers a certain kind of "miserable triumph," as Walls puts it. Bitterness and resentment give the satisfaction of the illusion that of still having the upper hand. It offers the exact opposite of Heaven: self-righteousness, bitterness, resentment, and self-absorption. Jerry Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*, (kindle edition) 1222. Lewis depicts this later in *The Great Divorce*, as the ghouls still despairingly choose Hell over Heaven thinking it better. As Satan famously says, in John Milton's *Paradise lost*, "Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven." Shockingly, the nature of Hell is also displayed on the cross. Jesus willingly submits as the Father pours out His judgment out upon Him. What Christ experienced, in His exclamation, "Why have you forsaken me," is exactly what happens if we choose our own path. God forsakes us by one's own choice. That is indeed the worst punishment of all, being excluded from the love of God in intimate relationship.¹⁴⁴ Love is at the heart of why some may choose to forsake God's love, as well as how God who is love could allow them to choose Hell.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas's Shorter Summa: St. Thomas Aquinas's Own Concise Version of His Summa Theologica* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2002), 199.

¹⁴⁶ Maybe we still have the ability to choose now because we are in the light of God's goodness and love still. Because we are still in this light we not totally fallen, meaning less than human. Contrasted to heaven where we be more human, more like God, than we ever are now.

will grow in their hate. God, a Triune God, is relational and it is precisely because He is relational that Hell is even a possibility.

iii. Hell is Reconciled as Inter-Trinitarian Justice

The justice of God also comes into play in a distinctly Trinitarian way concerning the problem of evil. The specific thesis is that the justice of Hell, is justice being upheld by each member of the Trinity, for each other member of the Trinity. To briefly review, all evil (or sin), is first against God himself. That technically means that sin is against three distinct persons (in one God). Sin is against a community. One cannot sin against the Father, without also sinning against the Son, and so on. While some might see this verging on tri-theism, this is what logically follows if God is three persons. Sin is against, God, but specifically against three persons.

If those three persons exist in a perfectly loving relationship with each other, then they have a responsibility to one another that is not exactly the same as it would be to created beings. If justice flows from perfect love, or is encapsulated within that concept, then it would stand to reason that they would uphold justice for each other. Sin is in some sense injustice against God. There are wrongs to be righted. Therefore, each member of the Trinity upholds justice, not for oneself, but for each other against the wrongs committed against them collectively.¹⁴⁷

This conception of inter-Trinitarian justice may surely strike some uneasy. However, it is worth noting that it would be unique to only a Trinitarian being, as opposed to a Unitarian God, who could only uphold justice for himself.

There cannot be true community without real love. How deep that love is will determine

¹⁴⁷ This is the key in understanding the mystery in of what Jesus says about the Christ being the son of David and yet simultaneously his Lord, in Matthew 22, “He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet””?”¹⁴⁷ The Father will make his Son’s enemies a “footstool” as it says in Psalm 110. Furthermore, Hebrews says of Christ that, “since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.”¹⁴⁷

not only the depth of the intimacy of that community but also how they will uphold and defend one another. If this love is infinite, then the justice they uphold may be as well. To not be offended, the failure to enact justice would be a failure to love, which would go against the very nature of God. Thus, from the heavenly point of view condemnation as judgment for the others in community is an act of love. As the cross displays God's love for humanity, Hell displays His love for Himself in community. Hell may show the extent of the Godhead's love for each other.

To object, some might say that in defending the other Godheads He is just loving Himself and does not prove that His love is different. This may or may not be the case. Either way, one can know this not to be true, because of the cross. It is the symbol of a God who is not only in love with Himself but also His creation. One can hardly say He sends people to Hell because He is unloving or does not care. He has already given his life for humanity, what more could he give?

B. Conclusion: Why Existence in Spite of the Risks?

That God would allow people into the world and to possibly suffer Hell is a difficult problem. It does not seem one can fully know that answer. But it might help to analyze, why humans bring their children into the world filled with evil. Possibly, it's along the same line of reasoning. Parents know that their children will be hurt, face suffering, and maybe even catch a crippling disease. Undoubtedly they will suffer at the end of life, which could be a long, agonizing, and painful road to death. Yet this does not seem to catch parents off guard in the slightest. Surely, there would be no other humans who love a child more than their own parents, and yet, they bring them into the world knowing they will face suffering. Either these parents are not thinking, just masochists who love pain and hope their children will too, or the human experience is somehow worth the pain. Maybe they do acknowledge the evils they will face, but also hope that their child will be able to experience the sweet boundless love and joy that brought

them into existence. God knows that the only way for humans to experience the solid and inexplicable joy of knowing him intimately in eternity is worth free will's possibility of evil in this world and Hell in the next.

Presumably, the same logic could be applied to anything that takes risk, whether base-jumping or participating in the Running of the Bulls. Common sense prohibits both in regular circumstances. For instance, in the bull race participants are injured seriously and even killed every year. Yet they come again and again, year after year knowing these possibilities. The joy, by whatever mentality attained (crazy or not) still outweighs the risks.

The suspense filled movie, *Ocean's Eleven*, may also give a glimpse into this topic. Here, Danny Ocean, the protagonist, seeks to pull a heist on a casino. Yet not just any heist, the world's greatest, and not just one casino, but actually three, all of which are owned by Mr. Terry Benedict. The stakes could never be higher as things are underway. It is then the audience finds out that Danny is not just about the money—what is really on the line is Tess, his ex-wife. He is really trying to win her back, as she is now with Benedict, who actually cares more about his casinos and money than her. Cunningly, Danny not only pulls off the heist successfully but also wins back the love of his life, while risking life in prison, yet only gets jailed a few months for breaking parole. After serving his time, Tess is waiting for him when he gets out and the two drive off in a 1960's Ford Falcon convertible. Danny was willing to risk it all for love, and love he did win—the ultimate gamble.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The main objective of this thesis was to push the theological and philosophical frontier of how we look at the Problem of evil. Pluralism and evil are two of the hardest problems confronting believers and skeptics alike. How are we to make sense of other religions and reconcile evil with God. This was mainly done by asking, what resources would a Triune God have that is explicitly Trinitarian for the problem of evil. The main body of this thesis then focused on explaining creation and free will. It is polemical in arguing against a Unitarian God, and subsequently any religions and Christian heresies which fall under that category.

This was done not in a deductive manner that excludes all other possibilities as logically impossible, but by abduction. It was to start a broad discussion. This attempt was not like building a Boeing but a rather glider. It is not as much analytically rigorous and impervious to any counter arguments as is something that is light enough to get off the ground and cover wide distances on a single tank. No, it's a more modest proposal.

This was done by abduction, which is simply “an inference to the best explanation.”¹⁴⁸ There's been many who have proposed features of abduction to determine which exactly is the best explanation. Of these proposed features are whether an answer has the “ring of truth,” that it seems right upon first hearing. Another is explanatory scope. The best explanation would most likely be able to account for the widest possible array of data. Along with this is that it accords with other facts or beliefs. For instance, is how would a God of love act. Another feature is the degree of *ad hoc* that accompanies a specific answer over another. Does one answer have to go to greater lengths to salvage its position? If so that may be the weaker theory. Again, these are not official or standardized features but general guidelines that can be used to make sense of

¹⁴⁸ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 55.

what exactly is the best explanation. It is similar to Ockham's razor in determining the most elegant and simplest answer. There are many benefits to this form of argument. Contra a deductive argument, an abductive argument's premises don't have to carry as much of a burden of proof. Also it is more epistemically humble.

However, there are weaknesses. The arguments here are based on intuition, which some will find persuasive and others will not. For instance, I presuppose that humans have free will. Many readers, especially skeptics and others (i.e. Calvinists) might not accept this at all. This paper also presupposes reality having an actual existence. The definitions, such as love, could be countered with other reformulations to include a Unitarian God. Another easily countered definition is free will. However, that's why I have simply tried to confine this special will to the ability to turn against God. This narrows the concept enough so the argument will no rest on other superfluous matters.

A. Summary of Arguments

The main argument has been the Christian conception of God as a Triune being makes better sense of all the facts of experience and reason. For instance, does it make sense for God to create anything at all? How do we explain creation from a theistic framework? Furthermore, it seems that humans have an ability to turn against God. Many define this differently, but commonly it is referenced as sin. Both of these are central data which must be accounted for.

A Unitarian God seems unlikely to be a "God of love," since he has existed by himself for eternity. If there is no other person for him to be in relation to and love, the properties of being relational and love seem non-essential to him. If He is not essentially relational and/or loving, then his nature would seem to be more centered on authority or power. With all this in mind it seems hard to why there is a creation at all if he is self-sufficient and does not inherently

value other beings. More specifically, how would this God also explain creating creatures with the ability to turn against him, i.e. free will. Anyone defending these positions seem to have formulate more and more responses to salvage their position. Overall, it seems to not explain all the data simply and in some cases, goes against our intuition, as well as even going into outright objectionable territory. Furthermore, it does not accord well with other beliefs, such as a doctrine of divine judgement.

However, the Trinity makes better sense of all the previous data. The Trinity exists as three beings, with separate wills and consciousness yet are inexplicable linked as one substance. Because of this the persons of the Trinity have existed from all eternity in a relationship of self-giving love with one another. The Trinity at its core is a God of love, completely independent of creation. None of God's essential attributes are dependent on creation in fact. It is exactly that God is love, which explains not only creation but also creatures with free will. Because he is essentially relational and loving he inherently values genuine freedom and relationship and creates humans with the ability to share in his love. While questions remain in formulating the Trinity, and an appeal to mystery seems inevitable, the degree of *ad hocness* is considerably far less. Apart from this, the Trinity has considerable explanatory power that is simple and elegant, covers more ground with more ease, and lines up with other beliefs better. Overall it seems that the Trinity is the best conception of God in explaining the problem of evil as it is conceptual resources are more easily grounded and make better sense of the data, i.e. free will.

As an attempt to push the boundaries of applied Trinitarian thought and in regards to whether a hypothesis accords with other beliefs, is addressing the previously mentioned issue of divine judgement. The Appendix tries to show how with Christianity Hell is not only something to be reconciled with a God of love, but it actually is an eschatological resource for the problem

of evil. In Trinitarian fashion the concept of Hell is explored through the themes of love, freedom, and God's tri-personal nature. It's argued that divine judgement is upheld as a result for his love for oppressed humanity, that it is also an outcome of God's respect from freedom of choice, and finally that it is a result of each member of the Godhead upholding justice for the others. With these thoughts in mind, divine judgement is still a serious issue that at the end of the day is not fully comprehended or easily digested. However, its hoped to have been demonstrated that Hell, whether one like it or not, does fit in with a Triune conception of God and is eschatological resource to his advantage in addressing the problem of evil.

B. Frontiers for Exploration

Beyond what has been said here, there are many additional theses waiting to be explored from a distinctly Trinitarian framework. One primary topic that was not discussed here is the Incarnation. This is largely explored in Marilyn Adam's incredible book *Goodness of God and Horrendous Evils*. It seem that the idea of the incarnation could also be explored in a similar style of argument used in this thesis. That it is because God is a Trinity, and hence a God of love that he is immutable and open to suffering. Reversely, Jürgen Moltmann says, "If God were incapable of suffering in every respect, then he would also be incapable of love,"¹⁴⁹ This like others, enables a trickle-down effect enabling so many resources which Adam's draws out. In similar thought, Adams comments on Moltmann's work saying, "his distinctive move reaches beyond Christology to claim the only Trinitarian (at least, multi personal) God could adequately identify with created misery."¹⁵⁰ Maybe only the Trinity is capable of entering into humanities existence as a fellow sufferer which enables other significant existential resources for the

¹⁴⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 23.

¹⁵⁰ Adams, Marilyn McCord. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 173.

problem of evil.¹⁵¹ As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Only a suffering God can help.”¹⁵² Other topics which pose a significant source of material are the Holy Spirit, and the doctrine of Heaven as being united with the relational triune God as opposed to other conceptions where one is never united with God.

On a final note, while the free will defense helps to make sense of the problem of evil, it doesn't solve everything nor take away its' sting. Yet, one can have peace in the identity of God. As Alvin Plantinga says, “so we don't know why God permits evil; we do know, however, that He was prepared to suffer on our behalf, to accept suffering of which we can form no conception.”¹⁵³ And it is this Christian conception of God, as the Trinity, a God of love, which enables such a thing.

¹⁵¹ Alvin Plantinga says, “Some theologians claim that God cannot suffer. I believe they are wrong. God's capacity for suffering, I believe, is proportional to his greatness; it exceeds our capacity for suffering in the same measure as his capacity for knowledge exceeds ours. Christ was prepared to endure the agonies of hell itself; and God, the Lord of the universe, was prepared to endure the suffering consequent upon his son's humiliation and death. He was prepared to accept this suffering in order to overcome sin, and death, and the evils that afflict our world, and to confer on us a life more glorious than we can imagine. Alvin Plantinga, 'Self-Profile,' in *Alvin Plantinga*, eds. Jas. E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), p.36

¹⁵² Dietrich Bonhoeffer as quoted by Richard Bauckham, in *Only a Suffering God Can Help*.
https://theologicalstudies.org.uk/article_god_bauckham.html#33

¹⁵³ Alvin Plantinga, 'Self-Profile,' in *Alvin Plantinga*, eds. Jas. E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), p.36.

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