

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

GOD ALONE IS GOOD AND WISE: A FREE WILL DEFENSE FOR THE LOGICAL  
PROBLEM OF MORAL DISAGREEMENT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
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MARIA CAROLINA REIS BAETA

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THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

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Grade	Date
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Dr., John Steven Knox, Thesis Mentor	Date
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Dr. Ronnie Campbell, Thesis Reader	Date
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## Introduction

Moral disagreement is commonly regarded as a threat to objective morality in academic literature and popular culture and perhaps one of the most significant objections against the Christian theistic moral theory. Some skeptics argue that, since people diverge about what is right and wrong, and in doing so, they provoke moral evil and human suffering, the Christian view that an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God is behind morality is inconsistent. Numerous questions about the revelation of God's moral law, God's power to prevent moral disagreement, and even the reasons for creating a world with such moral disagreements lead people to rethink the Christian worldview's rationality.

The present thesis will investigate if moral disagreement defeats the Christian view about God and the ontology of morality. It is difficult to find solid arguments that begin with moral disagreement and finish with an objection to the Christian view of morality. Nevertheless, this thesis will propose and analyze what one may call the “Logical Problem of Moral Disagreement,” applying the methodology proposed by the Christian Philosopher Alvin Plantinga in his “Free Will Defense.” The thesis analyzes theological and philosophical data about God's omniscience and creational power and the human attribute of free will. Further, this thesis aim to equip Christians with an apologetical evidentialist strategy for a cumulative defense of objective morality and the idea of God, arguing that the Christian view of morality is not logically inconsistent but rather that it is logically consistent in the face of the phenomena of moral disagreements.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James K. Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2011), 96-98.

## Chapter 1: Morality and Moral Disagreements in Need of an Explanation

### The Question of the Ontology of Morality

In his book, *Forbidden Fruit*, the humanist Philosopher Paul Kurtz affirmed that “the theistic foundations of morality crumble.”<sup>2</sup> when in the face of people's divergent moral commitments. Kurtz claimed that “the central question about moral and ethical principles concerns this ontological foundation,” and that moral and ethical principles are purely ephemeral since morality is not grounded in God.<sup>3</sup>

Kurtz tried to make his point about the ontology of morality in another book called, *Courage to Become*, where he affirmed that three main views address the ontological foundation of morality. They are humanist, nihilistic, and theistic. Kurtz, a humanist, defended that an objective relativistic view of morality better explains human desires and satisfactions.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the skeptical nihilistic view assumes that moral values are ultimately illusory and non-binding. In Kurtz's view, the theistic view of morality insists that human beings are incapable of autonomous moral behavior and that since God does not exist, it is impossible to deduce any moral commandments from Him with any reliability.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Kurtz, *The Courage to Become: The Virtues of Humanism* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 63.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), chapter 3, ebook.

<sup>4</sup> Kurtz affirmed that both theists and nihilists views on the ontology of morality is overstated. He suggested that a middle ground between objective and subjective would best explain moral phenomena. He defended an "objective relativism," which is the view that ethical values does grow out of human interests and desires, whether individual or social. However ethical values are not necessarily subjective, because they can be subjected to rational criticism. See Paul Kurtz, *The Courage to Become: The Virtues of Humanism* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 63.

<sup>5</sup> Kurtz, *The Courage to Become*, 95.

Despite Kurtz's efforts, much more can be said about the theistic explanation for God and morality. According to the theistic metaphysical account for morality, God is both morally perfect and somehow the ontological source of objective morality.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Christians reject the idea of subjective morality and hold that God's holy and loving nature grounds moral values, while God's commands constitute the base for moral duties.<sup>7</sup>

In doing so, Christian Theists embrace the idea that some moral values and duties are objectively true. Christians claim the truthfulness of objective moral values and duties; they believe some ideas and behaviors are good (or evil) regardless of personal preferences and whether someone believes them to be.<sup>8</sup> Based on such belief, the discipline of Christian Apologetics explores moral phenomena as something in need of explanation and argues that morality is objective and points to God's existence. Arguments based on the idea that human moral experiences point to something more attractive and final than human beings and that the ultimate reality is God himself are the subject of moral apologetics.<sup>9</sup>

Christians and moral apologists have internal and external reasons for their belief and defense of the idea of God and morality when dealing with moral disagreements. Internal reasons are in the Bible since the Scriptural data provides information about objective morality, the Natural Law, God as the Lawgiver, and why there are moral disputes and moral evil. Along with biblical data, Christian theists have their view of morality strengthened by external reasons, like

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<sup>6</sup> David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Introduction, ebook.

<sup>7</sup> C. Stephen Layman, *Is Goodness without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*. ed. Garcia, Robert K., and King, Nathan L. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Is Goodness without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*. ed. Garcia, Robert K. and King, Nathan L. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 103.

<sup>9</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, Introduction, ebook.

the full range of moral phenomena among individuals and cultures.<sup>10</sup> These moral phenomena intrigue not only theists but also non-theists. The main controversy among them regards the foundation of moral ideas. Some people assume that there is a comprehensive collection of transcendent truths instructing men and women on how to behave morally. They believe moral propositions are perceptible because they exist objectively and independently of human beings.<sup>11</sup> This perspective is similar to that assumed by Christians.

On the other hand, some people genuinely think there are no moral standards. From a moral perspective, people are free to choose what they should do and be for themselves.<sup>12</sup> Such individuals claim relativistic moral theories, affirming that morality is subjective and differs among societies, cultures, subcultures, or individuals. Some moral subjectivists also advocate any anti-realist moral position in which there are no moral facts at all—either objective or subjective.<sup>13</sup> Moral relativists and skeptics believe that moral disagreements are phenomena that play a crucial role in an argument against the objectivity of morality. On the other side, Christians may argue that moral disputes can even endorse the idea of a universal moral law provided by God.

#### What is moral disagreement?

According to the ethicist and philosopher of law David Enoch, moral disagreement is a difference in thinking and deeds concerning deeply held moral convictions and usually poses an

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<sup>10</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, Introduction, ebook.

<sup>11</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, Introduction.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 17.



objection to the objectivity of morality. The presence of widespread and enduring moral disagreement is all too common in daily life and human history.<sup>14</sup> It is a fact that many people disagree about moral matters. Moral disputes are clearly seen among individuals and societies. Even in small social arrangements like a family, there are conflicts about moral rights and obligations.

The topic of abortion, for example, is debated among family members and even brothers and sisters in a church. In this debate, some people claim that abortion practice is morally permissible and that it is a women's reproductive right. These are the so-called “pro-abortion.”<sup>15</sup> Other people are “pro-life” and defend that abortion is morally impermissible, claiming that the zygotes formed by the fusion of a sperm and an egg at conception eventually develop into people.<sup>16</sup> Some moral perspectives, like abortion, seem to be inherently irreconcilable and debate over them shows no signs of abating. On the other hand, moral philosophers uniformly agree that the phenomena of moral disagreement teach important lessons.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding the conceptual distinction between facts and values is critical when it comes to the question of moral disagreement. A fact or factual belief describes how the universe is, whether empirically, metaphysically, or religiously.<sup>18</sup> For example, the affirmation “Most Brazilians believe abortion is wrong” might be part of a factual belief. A value or value belief, on

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<sup>14</sup> David Enoch, “How Is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Realism?” *The Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 1 (2009): 15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40345390>.

<sup>15</sup> David Boonin, *A Defense of Abortion* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Enoch, “How is Moral Disagreement a Problem to Realism?,” 17.

<sup>18</sup> James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Filosofia e Cosmovisão Cristã* (São Paulo: Edições Vida Nova, 2005), 407.

the other hand, entails a commitment to some moral proposition that prescribes some moral requirements. Also, a statement that begins with “ought” is a prescription.<sup>19</sup> “Abortion is wrong” or “Abortion is ethically allowed” are examples of moral prescriptive assertions. In short, moral facts are statements about morality, while moral values are statements of morality.<sup>20</sup>

The abortion debate can illustrate three different sources of moral disputes. First, a moral dispute can arise from a factual disagreement. Debates concerning abortion, for example, frequently include questions about whether the unborn is a person or a human being.<sup>21</sup> Pro-choicers question at what stage of the human being's development does it cease to be morally permissible to destroy it?<sup>22</sup> Such a discussion is factual, albeit with significant moral consequences that cause pain and suffering. Paradoxically, both sides of the discussion may conclude that murder or infanticide is wrong, but they disagree over whether abortion is murder or infanticide due to differing facts regarding the fetus's status.<sup>23</sup> Second, conflicts over values can lead to moral disagreements. A disagreement about values may appear at first glance when one side affirms a moral thesis and the other side opposes it.<sup>24</sup> The idea that killing an innocent human being is immoral is, for example, a moral disagreement about the value of human life. Thirdly, a conflict of value can emerge when both parties agree on two or more moral principles

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<sup>19</sup> William Ritchie Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 4.

<sup>20</sup> James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 408.

<sup>21</sup> Boonin, *A Defense of Abortion*, xiii.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Tooley, “Abortion and Infanticide” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 2, no. 1 (Autumn, 1972): 38. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2264919>

<sup>23</sup> Boonin, *A Defense of Abortion*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 408.

but rate their relative merits differently. For example, both sides of the abortion issue may believe in the right to live and choose, but they weigh this right differently. Pro-lifers can argue that the right to life takes precedence over choosing, while pro-choicers might argue that the rights to life and choice are mutually exclusive.

Indeed, moral disputes involve conflicts about facts and values, making this subject relevant for philosophical and theological reasons. Debates in practical ethics, such as the abortion debate, debates in normative ethics, or even debates in metaethics, are promoted by questions raised because of moral disagreements.<sup>25</sup> One of the central issues in metaethics has always been whether skepticism and relativism are appropriate responses to moral disagreement.<sup>26</sup>

In the theological and philosophical milieu, moral disagreements often serve as objections to Christians' convictions about the objectivity of morality. Skeptics have been proposing arguments from moral disagreements over the last centuries. The late philosopher J. L. Mackie proposed a moral error theory in which he proposed an argument from relativity based on the variety in moral codes and beliefs across time, culture, and various groups and classes within a complex community. In Mackie's view, the difficulty of resolving moral conflicts is evidence of the lack of moral values, properties, or facts.<sup>27</sup> A similar idea was defended by the American moral philosopher Joseph Margolis, who affirmed, "I believe the evidence is against any moral confidence" when considering people's divergent moral commitments.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Zed Adams et al., *Disagreement and Skepticism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 110.

<sup>26</sup> Diego E. Machuca et al., *Disagreement and Skepticism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 13.

<sup>27</sup> John L. Mackie, *Ethics Inventing Right and Wrong* (London, UK.: Penguin Books, 1997), 36–37.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Margolis, "The Prospects of an Objective Morality" *Social Research* 46, no. 4 (Winter, 1979): 744. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40970811>

## Moral Disagreements and Moral Evil

There is a relation of causality between moral disagreements and moral evil. No reasonable individual doubts that there is a tremendous deal of moral disagreement. Every day, people are confronted with the possibility of making significantly moral decisions with consequences that may cause others to experience moral evil. When two persons disagree about the morality of killing an innocent unborn baby, and one side decides on abortion, the unborn baby will experience moral evil, pain and suffering.

People disagree whether to kill someone is correct (depending upon timeliness), also, some people dispute when to steal, lie, rape, cheat is the right thing to do or not. When someone rejects the objective moral code and does not consider the injustice, suffering and pain generated from their moral decisions, this person is making others experience moral evil. For this reason, the phenomena of moral disagreements are so important when discussing morality. Joseph Margolis noted that thinking seriously about morality must include reflections about the living sense of pathos, violence, intensity, conviction, contingency, risk, and contest of mortally opposed forces.<sup>29</sup> He affirmed that “disagreement about moral matters is a Janus affair” and defended the necessity to consider the details of war and crimes to treat moral matters properly.<sup>30</sup>

The Oxford University New Testament scholar N. T. Wright defended a similar idea. He affirmed that the atrocities committed in Auschwitz and on September 11, 2001, posed the problem of evil and suffering in a new way for the previous generation. Such events started a fresh wave of discussion about divergent moral commitments and morality. There were many

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<sup>29</sup> Margolis, *“The Prospects of an Objective Morality,”* 744.

<sup>30</sup> Margolis, *“The Prospects of an Objective Morality,”* 744.

questions about moral evil: where it comes from, how to understand it, and what it does to the many worldviews that exist, whether it is the Christian worldview, atheistic worldview, or any other.<sup>31</sup>

The Scottish philosopher William Ritchie Sorley also connected moral disagreements to moral evil when he declared that “the moral fact enters only when the stolen fruit, though sweet and pleasant to the taste, is also a source of conscientious pain; and it is this moral pain which needs explanation.”<sup>32</sup> In fact, moral disagreements contribute to the occurrence of moral evil and human suffering. Here it is worth distinguishing some types of evil. The term, “evil,” is commonly, but not always, used broadly in the English language; nevertheless, there is a distinction between moral evil of wickedness and such non-moral evils as sickness and natural catastrophe. Moral evil results from human actions and experiences, moral disputes, cruelty, injustice, viciousness, and perverse thoughts and deeds.<sup>33</sup>

Moral disagreements can motivate and result in wars, crimes, and transgression involving divergent moral commitments. Perhaps the suffering originating from moral disputes motivates so many people to reject the idea of moral law and assume moral anti-realism. For this reason, a further explanation of moral realism and anti-realism is valid to understand better how disagreement poses a challenge to the Christian view of morality. For this subject, the present thesis now turns.

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<sup>31</sup> Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), ebook, chapter 1.

<sup>32</sup> Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 56.

<sup>33</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 12.

## Moral Disagreements and Moral Realism

There are several distinct arguments from moral disagreement against moral realism. The ethicist and philosopher David Enoch mentioned that moral disagreements are usually presented as evidence for moral anti-realism.<sup>34</sup> According to moral realism, there are moral facts, and people can discover them. Moral realists contend that some actions, practices, and institutions are inherently good or bad, right or wrong, equal or unjust and that people are frequently aware of this.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps C. S. Lewis summarized what moral realists believe. He stated that Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, Christians, and Orientals alike have the same conviction that there is a doctrine of objective value, a conviction that viewpoints are actual and others false, to the nature of things in the universe and the nature of things human beings are.<sup>36</sup>

Although moral realism is typical in many worldviews, many people still reject moral realism and assume skeptical views about morality, denying that moral properties exist objectively. This view is usually named “Anti-realism,” “non-realism,” or even “irrealism,” and sustains the belief that moral facts are inaccessible to moral investigation. There are two types of anti-realists: those who believe that the concept of a moral fact is incoherent and those who believe that the search for moral facts, while intelligible, is always futile.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, moral realists agree to hold the coherency of the concept of moral facts and that the search for moral properties is worthwhile. However, there are disagreements among moral realists. It is conceivable to identify moral realists who differ not just about

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<sup>34</sup> Enoch, “How is Moral Disagreement a Problem to Realism?,” 17.

<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Sayre-MacCord, *Essays on Moral Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), ix.

<sup>36</sup> Clive Staples Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 18.

<sup>37</sup> Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 18.

whether moral assertions are valid but also about what it is in the world that makes such claims accurate.<sup>38</sup> Moral realism is the view held by classical Theism, and most Christians have acknowledged that intrinsic moral facts and properties exist as part of the universe's structure. Furthermore, Christians believe that God has specific moral properties such as goodness and holiness, also that people made in his image have worth and dignity, and finally, some acts are objectively morally correct while others are not.<sup>39</sup>

For many Christian philosophers, moral experience, which includes moral disagreement, enlightens people on the essence of morality. The philosopher and Oxford professor Clement Webb defended this idea. Webb recognized that human beings' moral experience provides good reasons to think about moral realities and objective moral law. In his defense of the moral law, he suggested that human beings seem unable to consider an act right just because they want it. He maintained that people's attitude toward the Moral Law is one that it can barely define properly except as one towards a personal lawgiver. However, the minute that someone attempts to separate the object which this Personal Lawgiver wills from the will itself, it ceases to be the authority of which the moral experience is the consciousness.<sup>40</sup> The idea of law and commands points to personal reference, and Webb used this idea to present an argument from moral law to a divine Lawgiver.<sup>41</sup> Webb concluded his argument affirming that the very notion of a Supreme Being who is not simply good but is the Good is therefore pressed upon the study of morality not

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<sup>38</sup> Mccord, *Essays on Moral Realism*, ix-x.

<sup>39</sup> James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 401–402.

<sup>40</sup> Clement C. J. Webb, *Divine Personality and Human Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920), 183–184.

<sup>41</sup> Huw Parri Owen, *The moral argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 49.

by the desire to flesh out the thought of a Perfect Intelligence but by reflection on the realities of the moral experience itself.<sup>42</sup>

William Ritchie Sorley is considered the author of the most advanced case for moral facts with a theistic approach before the current time.<sup>43</sup> Sorley defended the existence of moral facts and affirmed that people's moral experience could lead to discovering a particular law or order. Such a law can be perceived as objective, as a natural law.<sup>44</sup> He argued that facts of morality as they appear in the world, and the ideas of good and evil found in human consciousness, are among the experience data.<sup>45</sup>

In his defense, Sorley advocated for broad empiricism encompassing the human senses' liberation and the human experience of moral values and obligations.<sup>46</sup> The reality of a moral order aids in the intellectual justification of objective morality and the moral case for God's existence. Sorley affirmed that recognizing the moral order and its relation to nature and man involves acknowledging the Supreme Mind of God as the ground of all reality.<sup>47</sup> Sorley's moral realism argument defends that there is a moral law that is prescriptive of human behavior and that such moral law is the way people should behave.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Webb, *Divine Personality and Human Life*, 184.

<sup>43</sup> David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *The Moral Argument* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 74.

<sup>44</sup> Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument*, 74.

<sup>47</sup> Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



Despite the efforts to consider moral disputes as evidence against metaphysical aspects of morality, some scholars sustain that arguments based on moral disagreement have almost no weight against moral realism.<sup>49</sup> However, the interest of this thesis is to evaluate if a moral disagreement does undermine a specific kind of moral realism, which is the one held by Christians. For this purpose, a deeper analysis of the foundations for the Christian view of morality is required. The following section will present the biblical foundations and some compelling philosophical arguments that support the Christian account for objective morality and the idea of God.

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<sup>49</sup> David Enoch, "*How is Moral Disagreement a Problem to Realism?*," 15.

## Chapter 2: A Case for the Christian View of Morality and the Idea of God

Orthodox Christianity defends the objectivity of moral values and duties. According to the Christian worldview, morality deals with what is objectively right, as opposed to what is objectively wrong. Based on biblical data and human experiences, the Christian worldview assumes that human beings have personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, and moral sense, the capacity to recognize and understand good and evil.<sup>50</sup> The biblical foundations for objective morality and human moral experiences, including moral disagreements, have inspired theologians and Christian philosophers to develop moral theories centered on and founded on the infinite and transcendent God.<sup>51</sup>

For centuries, many scholars have been formulating arguments for God as the only adequate source for objective morals, justifying that no natural source adequately explains the existence of moral facts. Many of these arguments are grounded on the Jewish and later Christian belief that God provided a type of moral law to human beings. The following section presents the biblical data available for the idea of God as the source of morality.

### Biblical Foundations for Objective Morality and Moral Disagreements

Christian moral apologists have defended that the roots of objective morality and moral arguments for God are in Romans 2:12–15, in which humankind is said to stand unexcused since there is “a law written on their hearts.”<sup>52</sup> The first chapters of the letter to Romans in the New

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<sup>50</sup> James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door, A Basic Worldview Catalog* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 35.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>52</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New International Version* (Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2011).

Testament provide much of the Christian belief about morality. Although a single passage or chapter cannot establish a doctrine,<sup>53</sup> the first chapters of the letter to Romans present a compelling defense of the relation between God, objective morality, and human freedom.

Beginning in chapter one, the Apostle Paul synthesizes teachings about God's revelation to humanity, including the revelation of His moral law, presented in both the Old and New Testaments.<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that the Apostle Paul had no intention of developing a moral theory or pleading for God's existence in the first chapters of his letter to the Romans. As some scholars affirm, Paul's letter to the Romans summarizes “the righteousness of God revealed” that is equal to everyone<sup>55</sup> (Romans 1:16–17). Paul intended to explain how God's revelation and justice are for everyone, both Jews and Gentiles, emphasizing the impartiality of divine justice.<sup>56</sup> However, there is an exegetical discussion about the universality of God's revelation.

Some theologians understand that when Paul writes that God's revelation included the Gentiles, everyone (not only the Jews) has access to God's perfect attributes and His moral law. The discussion is about what Gentiles mean. Some theologians defend that Paul's referred to Christians Gentiles, while others sustain that the Gentiles are traditionally referred to as those who did not receive God's special revelation and the Mosaic Law as the Jews did.<sup>57</sup> However, it seems clear in Paul's letter to Romans that God's revelation and righteousness are for everyone,

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<sup>53</sup> Blomberg, Craig. “The Historical-Critical/Grammatical View,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics, Five Views*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), 36–37.

<sup>54</sup> William Hendriksen, *Comentário do Novo Testamento, Romanos* (São Paulo: Editora Cultura Cristã, 2001), 127–128.

<sup>55</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentário de Romanos* (São Paulo: Editora Reflexão, 2019), 99–100.

<sup>56</sup> Keener, *Comentário de Romanos*, 96.

<sup>57</sup> Johann Peter Lange and F. Rudy Fay, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 101.

both Jews and Gentiles, and God judges all of them that reject the revelation of His attributes and divine law (Romans 1:18–3:20). The Apostle Paul emphasized that God judges both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul explained the situation of both Jews and Gentiles is that both rejected the revelation they had from God and were then judged by Him and given over to the lust of their hearts, resulting in perverted acts like infamous sexual activities (Romans 1:24–25) contrary to the purpose that God created them and causing them not to recognize God.<sup>58</sup> These wicked and godless people are more likely to accept their corruptibility, willing to be persuaded to act dishonestly or immorally for personal gain.

The Apostle Paul remembers that people's deeds (like inventing ways of doing evil and disseminating wickedness, greed, depravity, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossips, slanderers, insolence, arrogance, and boastful; acting with no fidelity, love nor mercy) are evidence of the corruptibility of human beings. (Romans 1:29–31) These are moral evils caused by moral conflicts with God's natural law and in which people are sometimes agents and sometimes victims of such evil.

Although the idea of God judging impartially seems fair, people may raise objections against it. These objections can be like, “Would it be fair to judge the Gentiles since they do not have the written law?” or even “The Gentiles have no idea who God is or His law. Why would God judge them based on a law they do not know about?” However, these objections are not valid, and Christians may find answers to them in Paul's exposition in the book of Romans,<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Keener, *Comentário de Romanos*, 86.

<sup>59</sup> Hendriksen, *Comentário do Novo Testamento, Romanos*, 129.

where he also provides the theological grounds for the so-called “Natural Moral Law” that both Jews and Gentiles know.<sup>60</sup>

In his exposition, Paul introduces the theme of his letter explaining the Gentiles' situation of condemnation (Romans 1:18–32). The Gentiles suppressed the truth about God being evident in creation (Romans 1:18) and rejected God's revelation of His eternal power and divine nature that has been clearly seen since the beginning of the world (Romans 1:20). Such an attitude led them to put the creature in place of the Creator (Romans 1:21–23).

Paul then turns his attention to the Jews, reinforcing the question of God's impartial justice. (Rom 2:1-3:8) The situation of the Jews was no better than that of the Gentiles since many of them did not give proper attention to the special place they had concerning God. This special place is because they received the Mosaic Law and special revelation from God. (Exodus 24:12) As a result of their carelessness, they shall face divine wrath (Romans 2:1–5) because there is no exception in God's righteousness (Romans 2:2–11). God will recompense every individual by their deeds, judging each equally—whether Jew or Gentile—without favoring any of them.

In his letter to Romans, the Apostle Paul makes his first reference to the law, and he does it explicitly, emphasizing that knowing the law as Jews knew does not justify any excuses against God's impartial judgment (Romans 2:12–16) This statement reinforces truths about the universal facts revealed in the preceding chapter (Romans 1:18–32), demonstrating that every generation repeats the foolish and culpable rejection of the knowledge of God offered to Jews and Gentiles. As a result, everyone is “without excuse.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), s.v. “natural law.”

<sup>61</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 98.

In exposing humanity's inexcusable condition before God and showing the need for divine justice, the Apostle Paul also presented how the Jewish-Christian tradition understood that morality is objective, grounded in God's attributes, and available to all humanity through His revelation. Such understanding is present in Romans 2:1-16, where some scholars believe the Apostle Paul intended to address the moral man and woman, both Jew and Gentile since they have an idea of what is morally right and morally wrong.<sup>62</sup>

The Apostle explains that although the Gentiles do not have God's law and commandments on stone tablets (Exodus 24:12), they show that they have the work required by the law in their hearts when they naturally do things according to the law. So, the evidence is that the knowledge of certain moral truths does not require special revelation<sup>63</sup> (Romans 2:14–15). Based on these biblical data, moral apologists have found ground for a defense of objective morality innate in all humanity and available to every reasonable person.

Still, in defense of the universality of God's moral law, the Apostle Paul affirmed that those who obey God's law are righteous, not those who hear the law (Romans 2:13). Here, the Apostle explores a moral phenomenon in the Gentile world, that is to say, among those who did not receive the written law.<sup>64</sup> Such a phenomenon is that, at times, the Gentiles naturally practiced what the law required, even though they did not have the written law (Romans 2:14).

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<sup>62</sup> Charles E. B. Cranfield, *Comentário de Romanos Versículo por Versículo* (São Paulo: Editora Vida Nova, 2005), 54–55.

<sup>63</sup> C. Stephen Layman, *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*. ed. Robert K. Garcia, and Nathan L. King (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 63.

<sup>64</sup> Friedrich Adolph Philippi, *Commentary on St. Paul Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1878), 83.

Paul's statement indicates that the Gentiles' moral behavior was observable to his audience in Rome, mainly composed of Jewish and Gentile Christians.<sup>65</sup>

The Gentiles did not have the written law to follow, so they must have accessed it another way. Furthermore, Paul introduces a temporal clause when describing this moral phenomenon, indicating that the Gentiles' moral behavior happened in sporadic cases, in some happy eventualities.<sup>66</sup> Anyhow, the fact that Gentiles sporadically acted according to the requirements of the law does not imply that only some Gentiles could access the requirements of the law, but rather that some obedience to the moral law could be observed among the Gentiles even though they have another culture and other religions.

Later, the Apostle Paul explained that such requirements are available to all Gentiles. He emphasized that some Gentiles decided to obey the moral law they had revealed while others did not. Paul highlights the same behavior among Jews. The Apostle Paul explained that even the Jews, who received the Mosaic Law in written form, did not observe the law as they should and were also inexcusable and guilty of the very law that they were so proud of (Romans 2:12). The Apostle Paul eliminated the justification of Jews and Gentiles' moral behavior based on the kind and depth of revelation that they received of God's moral law. He also exposed their decision to obey the moral law available to them.<sup>67</sup>

A further explanation regarding the revelation of God's moral law to Gentiles may be necessary. Because Paul mentioned the Mosaic Law previously in chapter two, some scholars

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<sup>65</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 12.

<sup>66</sup> Frédéric Godet, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), 123.

<sup>67</sup> Hendriksen, *Comentário do Novo Testamento, Romanos*, 126.

believe that the Gentiles did not have the Mosaic Law (Romans 2:12–13). That is to say, they do not have the law of the ten commandments, as seems to be evident in Romans 2:21–22.<sup>68</sup>

Many theologians and Christian Philosophers believe that the Gentiles could somehow access the law's requirements, which points to the idea of objective morality.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, what contributes to the idea of objective morality is that the Gentiles could access the requirements of the law and how they did so. The way that the Gentiles accessed the requirements of the law was somehow natural (Romans 2:14).

Although some New Testament commentators, such as Charles Cranfield, defended that the Gentiles did not have the Law by birth,<sup>70</sup> others like the New Testament scholar William Hendriksen defended the idea that Gentiles carried a specific innate knowledge of the Law.<sup>71</sup> Hendriksen pointed out that the Gentiles had a kind of law written in their hearts and supported the idea that they had an innate knowledge of the Law. So, they did not practice the Law's requirements by the facts but because something present in them enabled them to meet the Law's requirements.

Even when the Gentiles did not have the law as originally written on stone tablets (Exodus 24:12), God inscribed the work demanded by the law in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33 and 2 Corinthians 3:3). The Gentiles had a perception of right and wrong, and God would not let them go without learning about Himself (Psalm 19:1–4, Acts 17:26–28, and Romans 1:28–32).

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<sup>68</sup> Hendriksen, *Comentário do Novo Testamento, Romanos*, 126.

<sup>69</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 490.

<sup>70</sup> Charles E. B. Cranfield, *Comentário de Romanos Versículo por Versículo* (São Paulo: Editora Vida Nova, 2005), 54–55.

<sup>71</sup> Hendriksen, *Comentário do Novo Testamento, Romanos*, 129.



For this reason, Paul says the Gentiles are “a law unto themselves.” A Gentile will occasionally do certain acts required by God's law by nature. That would be without the inclination or guidance of some written law and, therefore, in an intuitive sense.

The gentiles’ spontaneity in doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong according to the works of the Law reinforces the idea that there is a kind of law or moral standard. Such a phenomenon indicates that the Gentiles did not act as they did because they were educated to do so, neither because of personal or collective benefits, but because something inside them approved or condemned their intentions and actions, sometimes causing them discomfort. The expression “by nature” (Romans 2:14) is significant because it refutes the claim that moral deeds are expressions of one's personal assumptions.<sup>72</sup>

Instead, morality appears to be intrinsic or natural, and its source is God alone rather than human beings. Hendriksen defended this view and explained that the Gentiles sometimes did certain things required by the law of God in an intuitive sense. Examples of such spontaneous acts would be to act kindly to their spouse and children, have a heart for the poor, promote honesty in government, show courage in the fight against crime, and more.<sup>73</sup> These outward deeds demonstrated that the Gentiles had access to the law's requirements. However, it is difficult to say categorically what this knowledge or capacity entails.

Scholars discuss if the Gentiles have the complete Mosaic Law or only some commandments written on their hearts. Godet affirmed that Paul meant that the requirements of the law embrace the entire contents of the law, not only the accidental fulfillment of some good

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<sup>72</sup> Mackie, *Ethics Inventing Right and Wrong*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Hendriksen, *Comentário do Novo Testamento, Romanos*, 129.

actions.<sup>74</sup> Cranfield suggests that some pagan Gentiles fulfill at least part of the law as far as natural moral law is concerned.<sup>75</sup> Another way to understand Paul's sentence is that the Gentiles are "a" law unto themselves since the entire Scripture testifies that the Jews received special revelation regarding the Mosaic Law (Romans 2:17). Thus, the Scripture interpretation that the Gentiles did not follow the Mosaic Law but rather observed some of its commandments is preferred.

The Apostle Paul informs that the Gentiles have the work of the law engraved on their hearts, that their consciences also bear testimony, and that their minds condemn and defend them at times. The term conscience is vital in this Pauline teaching since conscience is the waking consciousness of the law inscribed on the heart.<sup>76</sup> Admittedly, Christians should reject any teaching affirming that the human conscience develops a moral code since it is not biblical. Instead, the conscience works as a court of appeal, capable of rendering judgment in the cases before it, sometimes accusing them and even defending them. The thought of conscience as a court of appeal is apparent in other Pauline writings, such as when he discussed Christians eating meat offered to idols<sup>77</sup> (1 Corinthians 3:7 and 1 Corinthians 10:25).

According to Hendriksen, the answer to the question, "Would it be fair to condemn the Gentiles since they do not have the written law?" is provided by the Apostle Paul when he recalls that when a person sins against the Moral Law, whether he is Jew or Gentile, this person is a transgressor before God (Romans 2:14–15). Just as God did for the house of Israel (Jeremiah

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<sup>74</sup> Godet, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 124.

<sup>75</sup> Cranfield, *Comentário de Romanos Versículo por Versículo*, 62.

<sup>76</sup> Colin Brown, *The New Testament Dictionary of New Theology. Volume I: A-F* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 350.

<sup>77</sup> Colin Brown, *The New Testament Dictionary of New Theology*, 350.

31:33) and Christians (2 Corinthians 3:3), He wrote the demands of the Law's work in the hearts of the Gentiles. God equipped human beings with a sense of right and wrong and did not allow even Gentiles to be without a witness about himself (Psalm 19:1–4, Acts 17:26–28 and Romans 1:28, 32). In this way, the Gentiles are laws to themselves (Romans 2:14); they have the general moral precepts of the Law.

The Jewish-Christian Bible assumes that every human individual is a moral agent who can know, or at least access, what is right and should do what is good while avoiding what is bad. (Rom 1-2) In the Old Testament, the prophet Amos delivers severe warnings from God to neighboring Gentile people for their atrocities and heinous crimes, such as tearing open pregnant women, violating agreements, acting deceitfully, and suppressing compassion (Amos 1–2). The underlying assumption is that these nations should better observe their immoral deeds even without God's special revelation. The Apostle Paul expresses the same idea, but more explicitly, teaching that the Gentiles are a law to themselves and being so they can access the work of the law (Romans 2:14–15).

According to the biblical data, all people know God's moral law. However, the sad reality is that, in general, people suppress the truth by their wickedness (Romans 1:18), ignoring God (Romans 1:21), and ignoring the moral law (Romans 1:32). People's thinking became futile every time and culture, and their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:21). Scripture also explains why people disagree about moral values and duties. It is not because morality is subjective but because “All people alike are all under the power of sin” (Romans 3: 9). There is no one righteous, not even one (Romans 3:11). Humankind is morally corrupt. Sometimes, people are agents; other times, they are victims of moral conflicts, but all of them are under the power of moral corruption.

Although the situation of humankind regarding moral disagreement is a tragic fact, the logic of the Old and New Testaments is compelling and straightforward: human beings are in a situation of corruption and disobedience that makes them ignore God's existence and the requirements of His moral law, causing not only moral disagreement but also moral evil. This fact is hard to endure and is also hard to teach. However, it shows that the ontology of moral disagreement and moral evil is present in the Bible. Since the orthodox Christian doctrine of revelation is that the scriptures are the special revelation from God to people,<sup>78</sup> Christians can find in their Bible the answer to why people reject God's moral law revealed to everyone and why they freely decide to disobey it.

The occurrences associated with objective morality and moral conflicts support three key elements of the Christian faith: First, the reality of objective moral values and duties available to everyone. Second, God is the best answer to the foundation of objective moral values and duties. Third, people freely decide to ignore and disobey God's Moral law, causing moral conflicts with God's law and between peers, resulting in moral evil. These three points will serve as the basis for several arguments for objective morality, human freedom, and the existence of God. The following section will address some of these arguments.

### Philosophical Arguments for Objective Morality and the Idea of God

The biblical foundation for objective morality has inspired many theologians and philosophers to develop moral arguments for the existence of God. There are numerous arguments in defense of objective morality and God as its foundation. The arguments from

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<sup>78</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol.1 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 190.

morality have modern ancestry, emanating from the works of Immanuel Kant,<sup>79</sup> and since then, moral arguments have been stated in various ways. Moral arguments rely on the objectivity of moral law and the premise that a moral standard exists before, superior to, and independent of all finite minds. As Kant declared, “Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the mind of thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”<sup>80</sup>

Christian moral apologists argue for a supreme moral mind, beyond all finite minds, from which the objective moral law exists. Sorley defended that the moral law is prescriptive of human conduct in his moral argument. Considered one of the most sophisticated developments of the moral argument prior to our day,<sup>81</sup> Sorley argued that moral law is the way humans ought to act.<sup>82</sup> It is beyond the natural world and is how people of all times, places, and cultures should behave. He defended that there is an objective moral law without regard to deep human understanding and people are aware of such a law as they are aware of the natural law.

When comparing the natural law to the moral law, Sorley aims to recall a naturalistic understanding prevalent among those of his time. He explained that, contrary to the naturalistic law, which is descriptive of the universe, the moral law is prescriptive of human behavior. For this reason, the moral law cannot be part of the natural world. Also, no finite mind fully comprehends the importance of such a rule, and no finite mind has gained perfect agreement on

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<sup>79</sup> David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *The Moral Argument* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), chapter 2, ebook.

<sup>80</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 258.

<sup>81</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 104.

<sup>82</sup> Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 190.

its interpretation, much alone conforming to its ideal.<sup>83</sup> That would be a way to present a theistic response to moral disagreements that cause such moral evil.

Following the idea of morality defended by Sorley, C. S. Lewis developed what may be called the most popular moral argument in the present time.<sup>84</sup> Although his intention was not to achieve a philosophical audience, Lewis' moral argument is often recognized as the most persuasive apologetic argument of the twentieth century.<sup>85</sup> In his book, *Mere Christianity*, Lewis defended the evidence for moral law in the face of moral conflicts and disagreements. He defended that the own recognition of moral disagreement would not make sense if there is not a natural law.<sup>86</sup> He said that people all over the globe have the strange sense that they should act in a particular manner, that they should follow a moral framework, and that they cannot seem to get rid of it.<sup>87</sup> Lewis's defense agrees with what Paul taught in his letter to Romans 1–2 since Lewis argued that people are aware of the Law of Right and Wrong, yet they violate it.<sup>88</sup> These two facts, according to Lewis, are the foundations of all rational thought about human reality and the world.<sup>89</sup>

Contrary to what Margolis suggested, Lewis argued that moral disagreements are not evidencing against any moral confidence but rather that moral disagreements would not exist if

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<sup>83</sup> Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 332–333.

<sup>84</sup> Baggett, *The Moral Argument*, 164.

<sup>85</sup> C. Stephen Evans et al., “Moral Arguments,” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Philip Quinn, Paul Draper and Charles Taliaferro (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2010), 387.

<sup>86</sup> Clive Staples Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>89</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 4.

there were no objective standard of morality. Moral conflicts would make no sense in a world without a universal moral standard since no one could claim that something is always right or consistently wrong and that some actions are good while others are evil. Without the existence and awareness of universal law, no one could say that the Nazis were wrong. If Christian moral views, for example, are truer and the Nazis' morality is less true, there must be something for them to be true about. This something must be some Real Morality.<sup>90</sup>

Lewis recognized that it is true that not every people fulfill the moral standard, but the own expectation of moral actions points to the idea of a universal moral code.<sup>91</sup> People worldwide expect love, respect, justice, and altruism from each other, and when they do not fulfill such expectations, they make excuses for their acts, that is, for breaking the moral law. Lewis remembers that such deeds are only possible if there is a shared moral understanding that these actions are, in fact, good.<sup>92</sup>

After claiming evidence of the universal moral law, Lewis suggested that such law indicates the existence of a universal moral lawgiver.<sup>93</sup> Although there are efforts to justify that human beings are the source of the law,<sup>94</sup> Lewis argued that this idea is inconsistent since the source of morality needs to fulfill some logical requirements that human beings do not fulfill.

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<sup>90</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 13.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>94</sup> John L. Mackie, *Ethics Inventing Right and Wrong*, 17.

Lewis argued that the source of morality must be interested in human conduct, as moral people are.<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, the universal moral Lawgiver must be totally good; otherwise, any effort to follow the moral law would be useless in the long run, as people would be sacrificing their lives for what is definitely not right. The source of every good must be absolutely good since the standard of every good must be the absolute and ultimate good.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, there must be an absolutely good moral Lawgiver. This Lawgiver, who is transcendent and absolutely good, serves as the basis of morality. Such attributes are found in the being Christians call God.

Another theist who explored the reality of moral disputes as evidence for objective morality and the existence of God was the Evangelical philosopher Elton Trueblood. In the chapter, “The Evidence of Moral Experience,” Trueblood explored the reality of the moral law in human experiences and affirmed that “the record of experience is that the moral law is discovered rather than invented.”<sup>97</sup> In his form of argument, he argued that there would not be such widespread agreement on its essence if there were no objective moral code. He asserts that no real moral disputes would have ever happened if everyone were morally correct from their own viewpoint. No moral position would ever be mistaken in this scenario, and each individual would be subjectively correct. There would be no moral dilemma without objective meaning to any moral terms. As a result, opposing points of view would both be right.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 30.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Elton Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 111.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*



However, Trueblood maintained that since there is the possibility of moral error, which is evident through human experiences like moral disagreements and moral judgments, moral truth is also possible. Like C.S. Lewis, Trueblood concluded that if there is a possibility of moral truth, which people reject when they go wrong, then moral claims pertain to a domain as independent as natural laws.<sup>99</sup> Trueblood lays claim to the evidence that moral disagreements demand objective standards in his defense of objective morality. Real moral disagreements are impossible without an objective moral standard by which both sides can be measured.<sup>100</sup>

Trueblood found that the best evidence for objective morality is a comprehensive agreement in moral views, which is too big to be explained by chance. The consensus of moral reasoning occurs in conjunction with the convergence of opinion on physical variables. He argued that the lack of complete moral agreement might be because there are more causes for moral blindness than physical blindness.<sup>101</sup> The conclusion, according to Trueblood, is that there must be a moral personal Mind behind human moral experiences. Also, rejecting the objective moral law is irrational in his view. Unless individuals believe the cosmos is illogical, there must be an objective moral rule and, by extension, an objective moral Lawgiver, as the Christian worldview defends.<sup>102</sup>

Even with such good theological and philosophical arguments, many forms of moral relativism have confronted the Christian moral theory. Events like civil and world wars, violence, and crime (in general) have contributed to the rejection of the Christian view about

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<sup>99</sup> Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 111.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 113.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

God and morality. Additionally, the internet shrunk the world into a "worldwide community" and keeps presenting different cultures to Western countries, promoting the idea that each culture has its own moral values and duties. Such situations have raised objections and intellectual obstacles to the concept of objective morality and God as the moral Lawgiver.

In the face of the reality of moral disputes, some philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists have been developing several moral theses that contradict Christian Theism's view of morality and moral disagreement. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig listed at least six main theses connect with ethical relativism and skepticism. They all relate to the idea that societies have disparate views on basic moral judgments, claiming that moral standards differ by culture.<sup>103</sup> Such differences among societies lead people to believe that different civilizations and ages have had quite different moralities, although some may argue that divergent moralities have never made a real difference.<sup>104</sup>

The difficulty of dealing with moral disagreement is enough to make some people embrace moral skepticism and moral relativism and deny God's omnipotence, omniscience, and total benevolence. However, what is precisely the problem with God's permitting moral disagreement? Many questions can be raised because of moral disputes. Some people may say that since God is the source of morality, He could make everyone agree about right and wrong, rights and duties.

Also, since God is omniscient, He could prevent people from disagreeing about moral matters, or still, since He is omnibenevolent, He would not want His creatures to fail about values and duties, causing such suffering and pain. Finally, some agree that an omnipotent being

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<sup>103</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 418–425.

<sup>104</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 5–6.

could create a world where everyone would agree about moral matters and offer a better world to His creation. Moral disagreements can raise many questions about God's essential attributes taught in the Scriptures.

Does it seem that moral disagreement, with its implications already mentioned, is incompatible with the idea of an all-perfect God that is also the source of morality? Nevertheless, specific questions inevitably arise: “Why did God not reveal His moral law to everyone in a manner that everybody would respond positively to His law?” Second, “Why did God create this world when He knew that so many people would respond negatively to His moral law, causing moral disputes and moral evil from such disputes?” Thirdly, “Why did God not create a world in which everyone freely responds positively to His moral law and avoids moral evil?”

These questions appear to imply the reality of certain counterfactuals of freedom concerning people's response to God's moral law. The doctrine of God's middle knowledge may better answer these questions. This doctrine defends that God knows everything that may happen and everything that would happen in any suitably stated set of circumstances. The following section further explains the concept of middle knowledge and its relation to human freedom.

### Chapter 3: God's Knowledge, Human Freedom, and Moral Disagreements

#### God's Omniscience

According to the Bible, one of God's intellectual attributes is His omniscience, the divine characteristic of having boundless or unlimited knowledge.<sup>105</sup> Although the omniscience of God is one of the most discussed attributes of God, this attribute refers to the capacity of God to know all truths.<sup>106</sup> Numerous biblical verses claim God's omniscience, affirming that God has all knowledge and knows everything that happens (Psalm 139:1–6). God sees everything under the heavens and knows every person's steps (Job 28:24, Job 31:4, Job 34:21–22). He watches on the wicked and the good (Proverbs 15:3), searches the heart, and examines the mind of every person (Jeremiah 17:9–10). Nothing in all of creation is hiding from God's view. (Hebrews 4:13) Even more remarkably, the scriptures affirm that God knows the future (Psalm 139:14–16). Moreover, the Old Testament Scripture reveals a God who foresees the future and foretells the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). Unlike the God of Israel, the pagan gods of Israel's neighbors could not foresee the future (Isaiah 41:21–24).

Jewish prophets maintained God's foreknowledge as one of the defining characteristics of the one true God above the false gods. However, the Bible registers something more regarding God's omniscience. The scriptural data suggests that God knows what would happen under different circumstances. The passage in 1 Samuel 23:1-13, in which David saves Keilah, reveals that God knew what would happen and what would happen in different situations.<sup>107</sup> God's

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<sup>105</sup> Edward Wierenga, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, Eds. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2009), 129.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>107</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene: Wipf and, 2000), chapter 12, ebook.

answers to David reveal His knowledge of subjunctive conditional statements.<sup>108</sup> Subjunctive conditionals are often called counterfactuals.<sup>109</sup> A counterfactual statement is a conditional subjunctive statement with a false or ambiguous antecedent,<sup>110</sup> such as “If it were the case that everybody has a special revelation of God’s moral law, then it would be the case that moral disputes and moral evil would be avoided.”

Although there are numerous biblical passages about God's omniscience, the Bible leaves an unanswered question about the reconciliation of God's foreknowledge with human freedom. Consequently, this question cannot be decided biblically because of the limitations in biblical data; instead, to answer this question, it is necessary a philosophical and theological approach.

For some theologians and philosophers, the fact that God knows in advance everything that happens and every decision a person makes indicates that everything is fated to happen. They argue that everything that occurs is unavoidable since God's total foreknowledge of the future entails fatalism.<sup>111</sup> Others affirm that divine omniscience and human freedom are irreconcilable and pose a problem against the coherence of theism. They claim that if God is both omniscient, omnipotent, and benevolent, He would have prevented all evil if He had foreseen it. Since God does not prevent all evil, it could be the fact that He is not omniscient, and that evil arises from circumstances that even God's vast knowledge could not and did not foresee. They conclude that the best answer for free moral choices that imply evil would be to deny God's

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<sup>108</sup> William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom, The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 98.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (New York: Cornell University, 1998), 6.

<sup>110</sup> David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Malden: Blackwell, 1973), 1–2.

<sup>111</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for Christian Worldview*, 280.

omniscience.<sup>112</sup> However, there is another alternative for the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

When thinking about a reconciliation between divine knowledge and human freedom, a question may rise: Does God know how someone would freely act in certain situations and circumstances? This question involves God's knowledge of subjunctive conditional statements and this knowledge is called middle knowledge or counterfactual knowledge. Because of this knowledge, God can know what would be the case if certain non-actual circumstances were obtained.<sup>113</sup> The middle knowledge of God is a kind of knowledge that is logically prior to foreknowledge.<sup>114</sup> God's middle knowledge of upcoming free choices does not decide but instead relies on the outcomes of those decisions.<sup>115</sup>

Whether God has middle knowledge is a contentious topic in the theological circle. However, if the doctrine of middle knowledge is coherent, it can explain questions related to God's knowledge of the future, divine providence, and the counterfactuals of human freedom. According to William Lane Craig, the doctrine of middle knowledge is quite promising; nevertheless, for it to be entirely satisfactory, its proponents must explain how God could have such knowledge first and foremost.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Stuart C. Hackett, *The Resurrection of Theism: Prolegomena to Christian Apology*, chapter 4, ebook.

<sup>113</sup> Davis, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, 43.

<sup>114</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, chapter 12, ebook.

<sup>115</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for Christian Worldview*, 282.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

## God's Middle Knowledge, World's Actualizations, and Human Freedom

Middle knowledge doctrine, commonly known as “Molinism,” named after the 16th-century Jesuit Luis Molina, is a doctrine according to which God knows all future possibilities, knowing how each creature endowed with free will would act in any set of possible circumstances.<sup>117</sup> The doctrine of middle knowledge is a non-traditional view of divine omniscience and has not been the prevailing view of divine omniscience throughout Christian theology. However, the Molinist approach to God's middle knowledge may better explain how God can actualize worlds containing free creatures. This doctrine is considered one of the most prosperous theological concepts ever devised to explain God's future knowledge.<sup>118</sup>

Although God has known everything from eternity,<sup>119</sup> the Molinist doctrine suggests that God has three logical moments of divine knowledge: natural, middle, and free knowledge.<sup>120</sup> According to Molinism, there is no chronological sequence but a logical succession in God's knowledge. The logical sequence happens because God's knowledge of some premises is conditionally or explanatorily antecedent to His knowledge of other propositions. In other terms, God's knowledge of one set of propositions is asymmetrically dependent on His knowledge of another set of propositions and so is posterior to it. Thus, the doctrine of Molinism does not claim that God's knowledge of one event occurs before the other in time, but that somewhat, God's knowledge of one occurrence helps explain the other.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Filosofia e Cosmovisão Cristã* (São Paulo: Edições Vida Nova, 2005), 13.

<sup>118</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, chapter 12, ebook.

<sup>119</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 237.

<sup>120</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, chapter 12, ebook.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

In the first unconditioned logical moment, God has “natural knowledge,” which is God's knowledge of all possibilities, possible worlds, and individual essences.<sup>122</sup> Through “natural knowledge,” God knows all necessary truths.<sup>123</sup> The content of the natural knowledge is essential to God and is independent of the free decisions of His will. Also, the content of natural knowledge includes the knowledge of every contingent state of affairs that could obtain and what the exemplification of each free creature's particular essence could freely choose to do in any actual situation of events.<sup>124</sup> This knowledge relates to the necessary and possible realities, and it is fundamental to God.<sup>125</sup> Through His natural knowledge, God knows the full range of possible worlds.<sup>126</sup>

Logically, prior to the decision to create a world, God possessed knowledge of everything that could happen through His natural knowledge and everything that would happen in any appropriately specified set of circumstances, called “middle knowledge.”<sup>127</sup> However, before moving to middle knowledge, it is necessary to explain another logical moment of God's knowledge: “free knowledge.” The knowledge of the actual world is called “free knowledge” and is the third moment of God's knowledge. Free knowledge offers the notion of true propositions because God wills them to be true. This category, unlike natural knowledge, comprises concepts

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<sup>122</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 237.

<sup>123</sup> Flint, *Divine Providence*, 42.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for Christian Worldview*, 521.

<sup>126</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 237.

<sup>127</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for Christian Worldview*, 521.



that are both contingents and depend on God's will.<sup>128</sup> Such knowledge is not necessary for God, but it permits Him to get absolute knowledge by a voluntary act of His will.<sup>129</sup>

The one called “middle knowledge” is the one that occurs logically between God's natural knowledge and His free knowledge. The middle knowledge is the logical moment when God possesses knowledge of all contingent truths beyond his control, preeminently counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.<sup>130</sup> In other words, God knows what would happen if certain preceding events occurred. *Previously, God knew what any free creature could do in any set of circumstances based on His natural knowledge. God now knows what any free creature would do in any set of circumstances based on His middle knowledge.*<sup>131</sup> As a result of God's middle knowledge,

Molinists propose that God knows that other contingent states of affairs will emerge if He actualizes some states of affairs. However, it is worth to note that God does not determines what will happen when He actualizes a state of affairs. Neither does He decide which creaturely freedom counterfactuals are true or untrue. *The middle knowledge doctrine states that if it is true that if an agent *S* were placed under conditions *C*, he or she would freely perform action *A*. Then, even God in His omnipotence could not make *S* desist from *A* if placed in *C*.*<sup>132</sup> True counterfactuals are, in fact, contingently true, so the agent *S* could freely desist from performing *A* in the circumstances *C* at any time, resulting in other counterfactuals being true and known by

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<sup>128</sup> Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence*, 141.

<sup>129</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 237.

<sup>130</sup> Wierenga, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, 141–142

<sup>131</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 237.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

God compared to those that are. Hence, proponents of Molinism affirm that God does not need to have middle knowledge of the specific propositions that He does know, but it is essential to God to have middle knowledge since He created humanity equipped with free will.<sup>133</sup>

The doctrine of middle knowledge maintains that God possesses a specific type of foreknowledge of human free acts, which is the basis of God's gracious gift of redemption.<sup>134</sup> Initially, Molina applied his thoughts about God's foreknowledge regarding salvation, predestination, and God's providence. However, the doctrine has been receiving critiques, such as: (1) that the idea of middle knowledge is impossible because it lacks an object, (2) that middle knowledge implies God's passivity, and (3) that middle knowledge annihilates divine freedom.<sup>135</sup>

These concerns are outside the scope of this thesis.<sup>136</sup> However, even facing critiques, the attribution of intermediate knowledge to God has been used in various ways, ranging from a solution to the problem of evil to an explanation of God's awareness of future contingents to a developed theory of divine providence.<sup>137</sup> The idea of God's middle knowledge may also have implications for the idea of God and human freedom, providing answers to the arguments from moral disagreement and moral evil.

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<sup>133</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 238.

<sup>134</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 237.

<sup>135</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 246.

<sup>136</sup> The present thesis is not primarily a defense of the Molinist doctrine of God's middle knowledge, so these critiques are not within the scope of this research. The research only considered the Molinist doctrine as a possible answer for the reconciliation between God's omniscience and human free will. For more information about the critiques against the Molinist doctrine, see William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 246.

<sup>137</sup> Wierenga, *The Oxford handbook of Philosophical Theology*, 142.

The doctrine of middle knowledge may answer one of the problems that have long perplexed orthodox Christians and even skeptics: the problem of the reconciliation between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. The dilemma is that many people believe that if God is all-knowing, consequently, human beings will never be free.<sup>138</sup> Some theologians affirm that human freedom is limited and is a sovereignly given power to make moral choices but is not absolute freedom since absolute freedom would be contrary to God's absolute sovereignty.<sup>139</sup> Others believe that it is within every individual's power to take or perform the action and within his power to refrain from it.<sup>140</sup> Finally, Molinists appeal to middle knowledge as the surest means of effecting such a reconciliation.

This doctrine has profound implications for the reconciliation of the idea of God's omniscience and human freedom and may also help to answer why a God that is omniscient and the source of morality would allow so many moral disputes. God's middle knowledge may be the means by which He shows His omniscience in face of humans free will. In an analogy to Molina's thinking, God would know how each potential free creature would behave in any possible moral circumstances prior to the divine decree. This would be possible because of God's middle knowledge.

In choosing a particular possible world, God commits Himself, out of His goodness, to offering various gifts of grace to every person who is sufficient for his moral choice. Such grace is not intrinsically efficacious in producing its effect; instead, it extrinsically achieves its goal in those who voluntarily participate.

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<sup>138</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 66.

<sup>139</sup> Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, s.v. "free will."

<sup>140</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 29.

Based on God's revelation and objective morality, it is possible that, in selecting a specific possible world, God is committing Himself to provide ways so that every individual in the perfect use of their mental faculties can access a revelation of His moral law and decide to respond positively to it. God knows that many people will willingly reject His moral law, causing moral disputes and moral evil, but He knows that many others will assent to it, thereby rendering it efficacious in effecting for good. Those who disobey God's moral law and are agents of moral evil have no one to blame since they act according to their free will.

## Chapter 4: The Logical Problem of Moral Disagreement

Many Christian apologists defend that objective moral values and duties require the existence of an essentially good God and that these characteristics reflect God's creation of humans in His image.<sup>141</sup> On the other hand, moral disagreements and moral evil pose a challenge to such moral convictions and the nature of God.<sup>142</sup> Some philosophers and laypeople believe that, at first sight, moral disputes and moral depravity substantiate arguments against the idea of an objective source of rights and wrongs and especially of a good, powerful, and all-knowing God who is the source of them.<sup>143</sup> This skepticism arises because some people believe that if morality is objective and if God is behind morality, He would prevent people from disagreeing and causing moral evil from moral disputes.

According to these skeptics, God could prevent moral disputes in at least three ways: 1) through His power, God could interrupt any action contrary to His moral law, primarily those actions that would cause harm to others; 2) through His benevolence, God would always wish to avoid moral evil caused by moral disputes like assassination, robbery, abortion and more, because an omnibenevolent being does not want people to suffer; and 3) finally, because of His foreknowledge, God could previously know when someone would reject His moral law and could prevent, by His power, this people to act so. Ultimately, these people believe that moral disagreements can be painful and that an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good being would eliminate every pain and evil.<sup>144</sup> In the face of such a challenge, the present and following

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<sup>141</sup> Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Passionate Conviction-Contemporary Discourses on Christian Apologetics* (Nashville: B&P, 2007), chapters 6, ebook.

<sup>142</sup> Margolis, *The Prospects of Objective Morality*, 744.

<sup>143</sup> Clive Staples Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 19.

<sup>144</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 13.

sections aim to address the following question: Does moral disagreement pose a challenge to the rationality of the Christian faith?

The logical problem of moral disagreement is not about whether a particular position's underlying theological convictions are correct, incorrect, plausible, or implausible. Instead, it is more about whether Christian theists have contradicting beliefs regarding moral disagreements. Because moral disagreement implies moral evil and suffering, someone can question the rationality of the Christian faith, as J. L. Mackie did in "Evil and Omnipotence." Regarding the problem of evil, Mackie wrote:

I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another.<sup>145</sup>

By "problem of evil," Mackie claimed that the most straightforward form was the claim that God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and evil exists. For Mackie, it seemed to be some contradiction between these three claims. As a result, if any two of them are true, the third is false. Nevertheless, at the same time, all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere to and cannot consistently adhere to all three.<sup>146</sup>

Moral disagreement and its implications may represent an objection to the Christian faith. As mentioned previously, Philosophers like J. L. Mackie and Joseph Margolis maintained that moral disagreements are evidence against moral theories that affirms the objectivity of moral values and duties, like the one defended in Christian Theism. The premise that morality has an ontological source in God is essential in Christian theology. God is regarded as the ultimate

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<sup>145</sup> John L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in *The Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 92.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–93.

foundation of morality. He is the source with a character from which commandments or will flow.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, moral evil and human suffering aggravate the problem with moral disagreement and both of which are consequences of human activities and their moral disputes.<sup>148</sup> It is important to note that human deeds and natural evil cause human suffering. Although human activity causes certain natural calamities, many natural evils occur without any agent's direct involvement.<sup>149</sup>

On the other hand, as the Church Father Augustine taught, the cause of moral evil in this world comes from human sin and its consequences.<sup>150</sup> Moral evil refers to the harm caused by human actions, regardless of whether the harm results from malicious intent or the absence of good intentions.<sup>151</sup> Philosophers like Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz suggested a more detailed distinction between moral evil from a philosophical and theological perspective. He believed that evil requires a metaphysical, physical, and moral interpretation. While metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, physical evil is related to suffering, and moral evil is sin.<sup>152</sup>

Besides the fact that some philosophers reject the idea of God and morality, other philosophers (such as David Hume, F. H. Bradley, J. McTaggart, and J. S. Mill) considered that

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<sup>147</sup> David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 9, ebook.

<sup>148</sup> Santo Agostinho, *O Livre-arbítrio* (São Paulo: Paulus Editora, 2014), 202.

<sup>149</sup> John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 22.

<sup>150</sup> Santo Agostinho, *O Livre-arbítrio* (São Paulo, SP: Paulus Editora, 2014), 52.

<sup>151</sup> Andrew Michael Flesher, *Moral Evil* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 7

<sup>152</sup> Freiherr von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy, Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 139.

the existence of evil is at the very least an embarrassment to those who believe in God.<sup>153</sup>

Suffering and death caused by evil are leading many people to reexamine their faith in God and the idea of meaning in this world.<sup>154</sup> Many modern philosophers take advantage of such situations and claim inconsistencies in doctrines commonly accepted by theists.

According to H. J. McCloskey, the theistic faith is contradictory because the truth of evil is incompatible with the belief in God's power and perfection. He affirmed that "God cannot be both all-powerful and perfectly good if evil is real."<sup>155</sup> When the question is specific about moral evil, some philosophers question why there should be sin in a universe made by an all-powerful, all-loving God.<sup>156</sup>

Moral disputes, along with moral evil, are sometimes offered as proof of Theism's coherence. While moral disagreement confronts God as the source of morality, moral evil that results from moral disputes challenges the idea of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, and morally perfect Creator.<sup>157</sup> David Hume's book, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, registers one of these objections, attempting to refute the idea that a being is the infinite author of nature compared to the existence of evil. In the face of moral evil, Hume suggested that people have no reason to believe that the uprightness of a supreme being resembles human

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<sup>153</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 164.

<sup>154</sup> Flescher, *Moral Evil*, 7.

<sup>155</sup> Henry John McCloskey, "God and Evil," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 10, no. 39 (April, 1960): 97. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2960059>

<sup>156</sup> John Feinberg, *Many Faces of Evil*, 22.

<sup>157</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Dorothy Coleman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 47.



uprightness.<sup>158</sup> He affirmed that although humans were hostile and destructive to each other, they were more compassionate and benevolent than the author of nature.<sup>159</sup>

In his view, people have more reason to exclude the idea of a first cause of the universe, which moral feelings are superior to human beings' morality because many people think that moral evil predominates over moral good more than natural evil above natural good.<sup>160</sup> Hume's objections against the existence of a being that is infinite, author of nature, cause of the universe, and morally perfect being are, in fact, an objection against the theistic view of God and morality,<sup>161</sup> since such being is what theists call God. Moreover, Theism claims God himself is central and foundational to the correct moral theory.<sup>162</sup>

In short, many skeptics of the Christian faith hold that the traditional theistic belief in God and morality is self-contradictory due to moral disagreements and moral evil. Most of these skeptics consider the following six propositions to be essential to traditional Christian Theism: (a) that God exists, (b) that God is omnipotent, (c) that God is omniscient, (d) that God is omnibenevolent, (e) that God is the source of morality, and (f) moral disputes and moral evil exists, as a consequence of human sin.

In fact, these propositions are at the center of Christian doctrine. However, some skeptics disagree about which propositions pose a contradiction or whose conjunction of propositions. Some would say that moral disputes are inconsistent with the idea of objective morality. Others

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<sup>158</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 52.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–53

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–53.

<sup>162</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 376.

may affirm that if God were the source of morality, He would assure that everybody agrees about moral matters. Others claim that a perfect being would prevent moral disputes and evil. In summary, the six propositions presented above may result in many arrangements against the rationality of Theism.

Indeed, the person who objects to the Christian understanding of God and morality is posing what one might call the "Logical Problem of Moral Disagreement," that is to say that he or she maintains that the set of propositions below is inconsistent:

**Table 4.1. Set A – Logical Problem of Moral Disagreement**

(1) God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and the source of morality;
(2) Some people disagree about moral values and duties and cause moral evil.

Since (1) is essential to Christian Theism, thus (2) must be denied. The conjunction of propositions (1) and (2) will be called set A.

Accordingly, the simplest form of the problem of moral disagreement would be the propositions presented in set A. However, set A is neither explicitly nor formally contradictory. A set of propositions is explicitly contradictory when one set member denies or negates another member.<sup>163</sup> Set A is not formally contradictory either since an explicit contradiction cannot be deduced from the conjunction of (1) and (2) by the laws of logic.

The objector may say that set A is inconsistent in a broadly logical sense, claiming that not all two members may be actual.<sup>164</sup> However, Christian orthodoxy will emphasize that (1) and (2) are not logically inconsistent. Then, the defender of the problem of moral disagreement may argue instead that the conjunction of propositions (1) and (2) is necessarily false. That is, it is

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<sup>163</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 13.

<sup>164</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for Christian Worldview*, 122.

false in every possible world. In the face of such an allegation, first-order logic cannot draw the evaluation of logical consistency.<sup>165</sup> The alternative is to recur to modal logic, one of the advanced logic disciplines concerned with the logic of ideas of necessity and possibility, truth or falsity, in other possible worlds and the real one.<sup>166</sup>

According to the possible world's semantics, necessary truth propositions are true in all possible worlds, and possible truth propositions are true in some possible worlds. When the objector claims that (1) and (2) are inconsistent in a broadly logical sense, he or she means that there is no world in which both are true. Consequently, it is the objector's responsibility to present at least a proposition  $p$  that meets the following requirements. First, the conjunction of  $p$  with (1) and (2) must formally entail a contradiction. If  $p$  were necessarily true, then the set (1)–(2) would formally entail the denial of  $p$ . Perhaps it could be said of any proposition which formally entails the denial of a necessarily true proposition that it is self-contradictory, at any rate in a broad sense of that term.

On the other hand, if  $p$  were an essential part of theistic doctrine, then, although it would not follow that there is a contradiction in the set (1)–(2), there would be one in some more extensive set of beliefs accepted by any theist. So, to make a reasonable claim, the objector must provide some proposition that is either unavoidably true, necessary for Theism or a logical consequence of such propositions. In summary, the proposition  $p$  must:<sup>167</sup>

- (i) imply a contradiction when in conjunction with (1) and (2);

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<sup>165</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for Christian Worldview*, 85.

<sup>166</sup> G. E. Hughes and M. J. Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic* (New York: Routledge, 1998), ix.

<sup>167</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 164.

(ii) be inevitably true, as essential to Theism, or a logical consequence of necessarily true statements, and that:

(iii) fulfill conditions (i) and (ii) could not be rationally rejected by a right-thinking person.

None of the philosophers quoted above seems to have succeeded in producing such a proposition; however, the following propositions will suffice for the present thesis:

**Table 4.2. Possible propositions  $p$  that would make Set A inconsistent**

(3) God can create a world in which all people would always freely respond positively to His moral law and consequently prevent moral disagreements and moral evil
(4) God would prefer a world where no one person responds negatively to His moral law, causing moral disagreements and moral evil, in a world some do.

The objector must claim that anyone who accepts (1) must also accept (3) and (4) since (3) must be true because of God's omnipotence, foreknowledge, and the fact that He the source of objective morality (4) must be confirmed in virtue of God's omnibenevolence. However, further analysis of such claims can show that the objector may be wrong about his concept of God and human beings' nature. Also, in the face of (3) and (4), another question must be answered: "Are these propositions necessarily true or incumbent to Christian theism?" In order to answer if propositions (3) and (4) are necessarily true for Christian Theism, it is necessary an analysis of logical inconsistency, which is the object of the study presented in the next section.

#### Analysis of Logical Inconsistency - A Free Will Defense

The essentially Molinist formulation of the Free Will Defense against the problem of evil presented by Alvin Plantinga, together with further clarifications of God's knowledge, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, moral nature, and human freedom, may contribute to answering the logical problem of moral disagreement proposed in this thesis. The free will defense may logically demonstrate that God cannot create one sort of good without permitting evil to exist.

These are good things that God cannot create without allowing some evil to exist.<sup>168</sup> The idea of free will in this thesis will deal with the fact that people are free to perform or not perform morally significant actions. These morally significant actions are essential in the logical problem of moral disagreement, and they concern actions that would be wrong to undertake but proper to refrain from performing.

Following the free will defense, in a world where agents are significantly free, people can respond positively or negatively to God's moral law revealed, and this is a better world than that of automata. Because God created the world with free human beings, He cannot obligate them to always respond positively to His moral law, avoiding moral disobedience and moral disagreements among peers. If every person freely decided to obey God's moral law, there would not be moral disagreement among peers, societies, and cultures. God had to create human beings with the capacity to reject His moral law. He cannot provide to them the freedom to execute moral choices and at the same time prevent them from using their freedom. This is logically impossible. Furthermore, following the "free will defense" a world with significantly free creatures is preferable, even though in this world people respond negatively to God's moral law causing moral conflicts and moral evil. If there are no complications from other factors, such a world is more valuable than a world without any free creatures.<sup>169</sup>

The terrible reality is that some creatures get wrong in exercising their freedom and reject God's revelation and moral law that is available to everyone according to the Scriptures. As the church father Augustine instructed, the source of moral evil, also called sin, is the abuse of

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<sup>168</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 45–46.

<sup>169</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 29–30.

freedom, but freedom is good.<sup>170</sup> Such abuse of freedom culminates in moral disputes and moral evil. However, as Augustine affirmed, free will is a good in itself,<sup>171</sup> and moral evil is not a defeat of God's omnibenevolence, omnipotence, and omniscience.

Likewise, the fact that people use their free will to reject God's moral law and cause moral conflicts does not defeat the Christian doctrine that morality is objective and God is the source of morality. God could only make people always respond positively to His moral law and consequently always agree about moral matters if He removed the possibility of them freely responding positively to His moral law.

### **Could God have created any world He pleased?**

The analysis of logical inconsistency in the set of propositions A, following the Free Will Defense methodology, requires a proposition  $p$  that conjunction of  $p$  with (1) and (2) must formally entail a contradiction also it must be inevitably true, as essential to Theism, or a logical consequence of necessarily factual statements, and finally could not be rationally rejected by a right-thinking person. Proposition (3) may be a way to evaluate set A's inconsistency since people usually claim that God can do anything. This idea is present in the J. L. Mackie objections against God.

God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong; there was open to him the better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. His failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Santo Agostinho, *O Livre-arbítrio*, 141–142.

<sup>171</sup> Santo Agostinho, *O Livre-arbítrio*, 134.

<sup>172</sup> Mackie, *The Philosophy of Religion*, 100–101.

Although Mackie did not mention the issue of moral conflicts specifically, his words exemplify how people usually misunderstand some attributes of God and human freedom. Mackie tries to refute God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence, claiming that God is limited in His power to create since He could have created people who would act freely but always go right, but He does not. This idea is also valid when the discussion is about moral disputes because some people expect that a God who is omnipotent and that always knows what is right and wrong since He is the source of morality could assure that people would always freely do the right and doing so would avoid moral evil such as murder, rape, theft, dishonesty, injustice, and war. Summed with God's benevolence, the defender of the logical problem of moral disagreement may claim that God should do such a thing and that it was His obligation to avoid suffering in the world. This thinking leads to beliefs like the one proposed in (3) against God's creative power.

The analysis of logical inconsistency considering proposition (3) requires the clarification of some concepts of God's creation. There is a common belief that God, when creating the world, had the power to create any world He pleased and even that He chose to create the best world following His supreme reason.<sup>173</sup> Perhaps the idea of possible worlds may well explain this discussion about God's creative power. A possible world is a way that things could have been; it is a state of affairs of some kind.<sup>174</sup> However, God does not create any possible world at all strictly.

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<sup>173</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy, Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, 131.

<sup>174</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 34.

According to Plantinga, a created thing comes into being at a specific point in time; that is, there was a period when it did not exist.<sup>175</sup> The Bible begins with the words, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Thus, the heavens, the earth, and everything in them (Psalm 146:6) had a beginning. The creation was an event or an act. In a narrative, acts and events only happen in sequence, connecting in some way to what has come before.<sup>176</sup>

On the other hand, there are no beginnings for God, numbers, propositions, attributes, or states of affairs. Indeed, God actualizes states of affairs. God's creative activity makes these states of affairs be or become actual.<sup>177</sup> However, God does not actualize every state of affairs. For example, God does not actualize His own existence; that is to say, he did not create himself, nor His own properties. As a result, God does not actualize the condition of circumstances in which omniscience, omnipotence, moral greatness, and the property of being the creator of the heavens and the earth exist.

God actualizes contingent properties, not necessary properties. Thus, God cannot actualize a possible world unless He can actualize every contingent state of affairs in this world. Such a condition does not limit God's power. God's creative activity is not in charge of the actuality of the necessary state of affairs. As a result, the idea of God actualizing the actual world does not mean that He is actualizing each state of affairs included in an actual world. The world is one of the possible worlds; it is the most conceivable state of affairs that is actual. At least one possible world exists.

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<sup>175</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 169.

<sup>176</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 57.

<sup>177</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 169.



In light of this, the proponent of (3) may reply as follows:

(5) If God is omnipotent, thus He could have actualized any possible world He wanted.

However, proposition (5) is not entirely accurate either. The evaluation begins with understanding whether God's existence is contingent or necessary. A contingent entity is one whose existence may both be and not be.<sup>178</sup> Contingent beings are neither necessary nor impossible.<sup>179</sup> A necessary being is one whose existence is real in each possible world, and regardless of whatever potential universe was real, such a being would have existed.<sup>180</sup> There is a being whose necessity is uncaused, and only this being may be named God among necessary creatures.<sup>181</sup> God is Himself a necessary being. He is the principle of all necessity, and whatever belongs to the nature of God is necessary.<sup>182</sup>

Knowing that God is a necessary being and thus exists in every possible world, the proponent of (3) and (5) may reconsider his objection and claim that:

(6) Since God is omnipotent, He could have actualized any possible worlds in which He exists.

The table below presents a summary of the syllogisms evaluated in this section, regarding the proposition (3) the objector must consider the proposition (6) when claiming that God could have created any world He pleased:

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<sup>178</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 15.

<sup>179</sup> Hughes and Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic*, 15.

<sup>180</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 39.

<sup>181</sup> Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways: St. Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 48.

<sup>182</sup> Tomás Aquino, *Suma Teologica Vol.1 - Parte I- Questões1-43* (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2009), 398.

**Table 4.3. Correction on proposition (3) regarding God’s creative power**

(6) Since God is omnipotent, He could have actualized any possible worlds in which He exists.
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**Could God create free persons always to obey His moral law?**

Again, although it is logically conceivable for God to actualize each possible world in which He exists, this does not imply that God can actualize any possible world if, and only if, it belongs to the appropriate subgroup of all possible worlds specified by the counterfactuals of free creatures that God knows to be true.<sup>183</sup>

It is worthy to distinguish between the idea of freedom and counterfactuals of freedom. According to the Christian doctrine of human nature, humans would not be truly human if they did not have free will. For this reason, God could not create truly free creatures and guarantee that they will always do what He desires.<sup>184</sup> God decided to create free persons.<sup>185</sup> The idea of freedom held by the “Free Will Defender” is that if an individual *S* is free concerning an action *A*, neither does God bring it about nor force *S* to perform or refrain from performing this action. Forcing an action is not accomplished through God's rules, direct involvement, or other means.<sup>186</sup>

Moreover, the Free Will Defense is accepted on the basis that an agent is genuinely free regarding an action only if the circumstance in which he or she is situated is logically and

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<sup>183</sup> Thomas P. Flint, *The Molinist Account of Providence*, 51.

<sup>184</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), chapter 18, ebook..

<sup>185</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 165–166.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 170–171.

causally compatible with both the decision to do and the decision not to execute the action.<sup>187</sup> So, causal laws and antecedent conditions will limit the freedom of such creatures. No person is able just to do anything. The fact that persons have free will does not mean that they are free to perform superhuman acts, for example.

For logical reasons, human freedom is also under causal laws. However, if humans are free to take or abstain from doing an action A, causal laws and antecedent conditions have no bearing on whether they take or refrain from taking A.<sup>188</sup> Casual laws do not determine S regarding A. From this perspective, God decided on the existence of creatures whose activity is not causally determined—creatures who, like him, are creative units.

The correct comprehension of human freedom is essential to understand what is within God's power when He actualizes a world containing free creatures. God's capacity to actualize worlds with free creatures will be limited by which counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true in the logical instant before the divine edict.<sup>189</sup> Again, such a condition does not conflict with the idea of God's omnipotence, but it happens because a world containing free creatures also contains counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Counterfactual statements, as previously established, are conditional claims in the subjunctive mood with their own logic that differ from their indicative counterparts in several ways.<sup>190</sup> Because counterfactuals are contingent

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<sup>187</sup> Thomas P. Flint, "The Problem of Divine Freedom," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1983): 255. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20014006>

<sup>188</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 171.

<sup>189</sup> Flint, "The Problem of Divine Freedom," 256–257.

<sup>190</sup> J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for Christian Worldview*, 72–73.

statements, they are true or untrue relative to a conceivable reality and prevent other counterfactuals.<sup>191</sup>

Thus, God could not actualize possible worlds, even if these worlds contain His existence, if they contained a state of affairs including some creatures capable of freely performing or refraining from performing actions. Now, the world containing moral freedom is such a world. Thus, the analysis shows that the fact that God could not have actualized a world containing moral freedom without moral disputes is logically superior to the one proposed in (6). Still, the objector can revise his proposition (6) and claim that:

**Table 4.4. Correction on proposition (6) after clarification about counterfactuals of creaturely freedom**

(7) God can actualize a possible world that includes His existence and in which all persons would freely decide to respond positively to His moral law and avoid moral disagreement and moral evil.
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However, is (7) necessarily true or incumbent upon the Christian? No, it is not at all obvious. It does not follow from God's omnipotence that He is capable of realizing every potential world. Following the Free Will Defense methodology, an essential distinction between a stronger and a weaker world's actualizations may help this reasoning. God's strong actualizations are limited to what He can cause to be actual; in this sense, he cannot actualize any condition of circumstances, including the reality of beings that have free will. Hence, in a world containing free creatures, God's strong actualizations are limited.<sup>192</sup>

If the doctrine of middle knowledge is at least plausible, and considering a world containing free creatures, God could strongly actualize, through His middle knowledge, only

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<sup>191</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for Christian Worldview*, 73.

<sup>192</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 173.

specific segments or states of affairs of what free creatures would do under any circumstances.<sup>193</sup> In effect, God's middle knowledge would delimit the range of logically possible worlds that He knows through His natural knowledge from those that are viable for Him to actualize due to the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.<sup>194</sup> For atheists philosophers like J. L. Mackie, keeping the attribute of "omnipotence" but explaining its meaning logically, declaring some things that an omnipotent being cannot do, may seem inconsistent.<sup>195</sup> However, such a restriction does not imply that the Christian belief in God's omnipotence seems inconsistent.

### **Could God always prevent people from doing the wrong thing?**

Nonetheless, the proponent of the logical problem of moral disagreement can claim that the issue is not whether each possible world is such that God could have actualized it in the strong sense but whether, for each possible world, there was something God could have performed that would make a world with more minor moral disputes and if He could cause this better world to be actual. Usually, people think that it is within God's power to ensure the existence of a perfect or at least better world. Such a world would be, among other things, without moral disputes and moral evil, or at least without the numerous moral disputes and moral evil that the actual world has.

However, as Plantinga stated, the "Free Will Defender" claims that God could not have actualized a world with moral goodness without creating one with moral evil.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, the "Free Will Defender" can claim that God could not have actualized a world containing people

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<sup>193</sup> Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, 111.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>195</sup> Mackie, *Evil and Omnipotence*, 201.

<sup>196</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 173.

with free will without actualizing one containing moral disagreement and moral evil. So, the question is whether it is necessarily true for the Christian to believe that, within the range of possible worlds which are feasible for God, there is at least one world in which everyone freely responds positively to His moral law, avoiding moral disputes and moral evil. The proponent of the problem of moral disagreement may turn now to question God's omniscience and claim

**Table 4.5. Objection against God's omniscience in face of the problem of moral disagreement**

(8) God knows for any individual <i>S</i> under what circumstances <i>S</i> would always freely positively respond to His moral law revealed, avoiding moral disputes and moral evil.
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Nevertheless, why is it obligatory for the Christian to accept (8)? Given the free will, it might not be persons who would reject God's moral law in any actual world in which they existed and in any set of circumstances? It seems plausible that, due to free will, it is logically possible that some person should resist the revealed moral law God provided, provoking thus moral disagreement and moral evil.

The Bible is clear when it instructs that human beings were called to be free but should not use their freedom to indulge the flesh. (Gal 5:13) The term flesh here refers to the sinful state of human beings in opposition to God's will for them.<sup>197</sup> Even though God knew a set of circumstances in which *S* would freely act according to His moral law, God could only guarantee that *S* would obey His moral law if He removed the free will of this individual. So (8) cannot be regarded as necessary or essential to Christian Theism. On the contrary, the theist might hold that:

**Table 4.6. Answer to objection (8)**

(9) For some individuals <i>S</i> , there are no circumstances under which <i>S</i> would always freely respond positively to God's moral law revealed, avoiding moral disputes and moral evil.
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<sup>197</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 482–483.

Consequently, contrary to (3), the Christian theist might hold that

**Table 4.7. Correction on proposition (3) after clarifications about God's attributes and human Free-Will**

(10) There is no world feasible for God in which all persons would always freely respond positively to God's moral law revealed, avoiding moral disputes and moral evil.
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Someone may think that the best conceivable world would be the one in which everybody freely decides to respond positively to God's moral law revealed because God is good and what He requires is also good. Doing so the occurrences of significantly moral disputes and moral evil would reduce. Since God's law is perfect, and it revives the human soul (Psalm 19:7), when responding positively to God's law, a person chooses the good for himself and others (James 2:8-9) because whoever loves others has fulfilled the law (Roman 13:8). As the Apostle Paul instructed, those who want to avoid moral evils like adultery, murder, stealing, coveting, and other sins considered in God's law should keep the commandment that summarizes God's law: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Romans 13:9). Love does not harm a neighbor. Therefore, love fulfills the law and is the weapon against moral evil. Thus, unless someone has good reason to think that (10) is impossible or essentially incompatible with Christian Theism, the objector has failed to show (1) and (2) to be logically inconsistent.

### **What is the preferable world of an omnibenevolent God that is the source of morality?**

The analysis now goes to the proposition (4), in which the proponent of the problem of moral disagreement may claim to be binding upon everyone who believes in God's omnibenevolence. The idea here is that an omnibenevolent God would prefer that all people agree about God's moral law and avoid moral disputes and moral evil in the actual world. Nevertheless, proposition (4) goes a step further. It claims that God prefers any world in which

all the persons are favorable to His moral law and causes no moral disputes and moral evil to a world in which some people do so. However, this is not immediately clear.

Consider that the only world in which all people choose to obey God's moral law is a world with only automata. People are not free to take significant moral actions in such a world. Is it not at least possible that this world is not the best option for God than a world in which great multitudes come to experience the blessing of obeying His moral law compared to a few that cause moral evil? This scenario seems to be possible and the most probable scenario. As the omnibenevolent being and the source of morality, God may desire that as many creatures as possible freely respond positively to His moral law and prevent moral conflict and evil. The Old Testament Scripture seems to be clear about this when God declares His desire that His people's hearts would be inclined to fear Him and keep all His commands always so that it might go well with them and their children forever (Deuteronomy 5:29). Jesus presents the same expectation when he proclaims, "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15).

Nevertheless, given certain true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, God may have to allow some moral conflicts and moral evil to have a multitude obey His moral law. As a result, and contrary to (4), the Christian theist may readily believe that:

**Table 4.8. Proposition in substitution of (4)**

(11) God prefers certain worlds in which some persons freely fail to respond positively to the revelation they have of His moral law, provoking moral disputes and moral evil, to certain worlds in which all individuals are not free to perform or refrain from performing His moral law and consequently do not commit moral disagreement and moral evil.
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There are no reasons to believe that (11) is impossible or incompatible with Christian Theism. As a result, the objector has failed to prove that (1) and (2) are incompatible or inconsistent. Finally, after the analysis of logical inconsistency, it was shown that there are no reasonable grounds for someone believing (3) and (4) to be necessary or essential to Christian Theism, or even if they are conditionally true. The proponent of the logical problem of moral



disagreement proposed in this thesis has not succeeded in demonstrating that there is no possible world in which God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and the source of morality and yet in which some persons freely decide to reject God's moral law, causing moral disputes and moral evil.

#### A defense of Logical Consistency

Applying the Free Will Defense methodology,<sup>198</sup> the Christian Theist can not only defend that (1) and (2) are not inconsistent but also that they are consistent. For this defense, it is necessary to present a proposition compatible with (1), and that together with (1) results in (2). Since this consistency analysis is built on modal logic, such a proposition simply needs to be a possibly true statement, and there is no need for it to be plausible or even true.<sup>199</sup> In search of such a proposition, it will be considered the Set B below:

**Table 4.9. Set B - Considerations for the defense of logical consistency of Set A**

(i) There are certain counterfactuals of freedom for free creatures.
(ii) God has Middle knowledge.
(iii) God prefers certain worlds in which some people freely recognize and others freely reject God's objective moral standard to certain worlds in which everyone obligatorily accepts God's objective moral standard

Due to God's omnibenevolence, His desire may be to have the lowest number of people rejecting His objective moral law, decreasing moral disputes and moral evil in the world. Because He prefers a world with people free to make morally significant decisions, He may want a perfect balance in the occurrence of agreements and disagreements with His moral standard, in such a way that there is more moral good than moral evil in such a world.

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<sup>198</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 189–190.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

It is even possible that a balance is already taking place between positive and negative responses to God's moral law, which impacts an optimal balance in moral disputes and moral good and evil in this actual world. God may have actualized a world where fewer people respond negatively to His moral law than people respond positively. Thus, God accepts the current amount of moral disagreements to His moral standard to achieve this perfect balance.

Objectors may claim that, necessarily, no perfect balance would justify the creation of a person like Adolph Hitler by a loving God. They may claim that he could have refrained from creating Hitler and other evildoers due to God's middle knowledge. However, this objection does not seem to be necessarily true.

In fact, according to God's revelation in the Scriptures, He desires that all people freely decide to do good to others. His wish is that people serve one another humbly in love because the entire law is fulfilled in keeping the commandment to love the neighbors as loving oneself (Romans 13:8–10, Galatians 5:13–14). The reality is that they reject God's moral law because of people's free choice, causing moral disagreements and suffering. The moral evil prevention of moral disputes results from individuals' own choice and is contrary to God's perfect will, which is that all persons freely decide to act according to His moral law and are blessed.

Someone may wonder why a benevolent and all-knowing God would create persons whom He knew would eventually respond positively and negatively to His moral law at the same time and place. Maybe, the objector may claim that if God had created different worlds, certainly there would be a better balance in people's suffering. They may claim that God could have created one containing people that He knew, by His knowledge, that would respond positively to His moral law and another with people that would respond negatively. There would be less expectation of moral good in the second world.

The objector may claim that, given His middle knowledge, God should have refrained from creating these two types of people altogether. However, this thinking does not seem to imply a defeat of the Christian doctrine of God and morality either. Again, what can be learned from the Scriptures is that God loves all persons and desires that they freely decide to respond positively to His moral law, and He provided sufficient revelation of His law to all people. They reject God's moral law, increasing moral disputes, and moral evil is their own free decisions.

The objector can insist that must be something that an all-knowing and loving God could do to at least decrease the number of moral disputes and moral evil. The objector may claim that, because of His middle knowledge, God knows the exact circumstances in which each person would always respond positively to His moral law. Also, because of His omnibenevolence, it is expected that God wants all people to enjoy the benefits of His moral law, and for that, everyone would have to respond positively to it.

More profoundly, the objector can claim that an omnibenevolent and omniscient God, through His middle-knowledge, should place people in circumstances such that they would always respond positively to God's moral law and avoid moral disputes and moral evil. If God could not make such an arrangement, He should not have created persons who would reject His moral standard.

Facing these objections, Christian theists could present two answers. First, they can argue that as long as people receive sufficient revelation of God's moral law in whatever circumstances, people are responsible for their response and cannot complain that their reaction would have been different if they were placed in different circumstances. Therefore, it follows that it was not within God's power to create a world in which people are free to take morally

significant actions and always respond positively to His moral standard, avoiding moral disagreements.

Secondly, Christian Theist could resort to the concept of “transworld corruptibility,” which is an analogy to the term, “transworld depravity,” one of the central points of the defense of free will. “Transworld depravity” is applied to essences rather than persons and is an accidental property of the essences and people it affects.<sup>200</sup> Plantinga claimed that if all creature essence suffers from “transworld depravity,” then it is impossible for God to create a world with significantly free creatures and no moral evil.<sup>201</sup>

In his work, Plantinga does not argue for the possibility that all essence suffers from transworld depravity but just presupposes it. However, in recent years, such presupposition suffered much criticism. One notable critic came from Richard Otte, Professor Emeritus at the University of California at Santa Cruz, who defended that transworld depravity cannot affect all essences.<sup>202</sup> He reformulated the concept of transworld depravity, and an analogy of this reformulation to the logical problem of the moral disagreement presented here would be like:<sup>203</sup>

An essence E suffers from transworld corruptibility if, for each world W in which E has the properties to take morally free actions and always answers positively to God's moral law in W, there is a time t and an action A int such as:

- (i) A is an action that is morally significant for E's instantiation in W at t, and
- (ii) if God had (weakly) actualized the initial segment of W up to t, E's instantiation would have responded negatively to God's moral law concerning A.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 187.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Otte, “*Transworld Depravity*,” 167.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

This analogy would suffice to demonstrate the possibility that one person would respond negatively to the objective moral law every time God tries to actualize a world without moral disputes. Going further in defense of logical consistency, another “Free Will Defense” model can be proposed, based on the concept of “Unobtainable Worlds.”<sup>205</sup> This concept would be like this:

A world  $W$  in which there are significantly morally free choices and every choice is according to God’s moral law is unobtainable if:

(i) If there are one or more significantly morally free first choices in  $W$  at time  $t$ , then it is true that, if God had actualized the initial segment of  $W$  until  $t$ , someone would have freely chosen to respond negatively to the objective moral law at moment  $t$ . If there is no first significantly morally free choice in  $W$ , then for any free choice at a time  $t$  there is a free choice at an earlier time  $t'$  such that, it is true that if God had actualized the initial segment of  $W$  until  $t'$ , someone would have freely responded negatively to the objective moral law at  $t'$ , causing moral disputes and moral evil.

The counterfactual (i) considers a better scenario, in which there are first significant moral choices in a world  $W$ , while the counterfactual (ii) considers the possibility of morally free agents with infinite choices and the counterfactual. Notwithstanding, if all worlds in which people always react favorably to the moral code may be unattainable, then God must have a reason for tolerating significantly moral disputes to exist.

Following the model proposed by Professor Richard Otte, more can be done in defense of the logical consistency discussed in this thesis. The believer can propose a model that does appeal to the concept of counterfactuals of freedom and argues that a world  $W$  where there are free meaningful moral choices, and they are all positive responses to the objective moral law is unattainable if and only if:

(i) If there are one or more first free meaningful moral choices at  $W$  and a time  $t$ , then it is false that if God had updated the initial segment from  $W$  to  $t$ , all people would have responded positively to God's moral law at  $t$ ; and

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<sup>205</sup> Otte, “*Transworld Depravity*,” 174.

(ii) If there are no first free meaningful moral choices in  $W$ , then for any significant morally free choice at time  $t$ , there is a free choice at an earlier time  $t'$  such that it is false that if God had updated the initial segment from  $W$  to  $t'$ , all people would have responded positively to God's moral law in  $t'$ .

Finally, after the defense of the concepts of transworld corruptibility and unobtainable worlds, a proposition that is logically consistent with (1) and entails (2) would be:

**Table 4.10. Proposition p that is logically consistent with Set A**

(12) God has actualized a world containing an optimal balance between people who respond positively and negatively to His moral law and a world where people always freely respond positively to God's moral law, there are no moral disputes, and moral evil is an unobtainable world.
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It seems clear that this proposition is epistemically possible. It is epistemically possible that God has a good reason for permitting moral disputes, even though such moral disputes imply moral evil. If all morally perfect worlds are unobtainable, God could not actualize a world containing free moral agents without moral disputes. So, the Christian Theist is consistent in believing both (1) and (2) since (12) is possible.

After this logical analysis, the three questions presented in the first chapter of this thesis can finally be answered. The first question was, "Why did God not provide special revelation of His moral law to all persons, since they would have responded positively to the objective moral law if they had been adequately educated about it?" To answer this question, it showed that, according to the Scripture, God provided a revelation of His moral law to everyone, Jew and Gentile, and both of them that reject the requirements of God's moral law are inexcusable before God.

Additionally, it was demonstrated that, because of certain true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, there is no such world in which all people respond positively to the objective

moral law that is feasible for God. Every world feasible to God is a world in which people everywhere and every time freely decide to reject God's moral law, causing moral disputes and consequently moral evil. Because God decided to create a world with free creatures capable of making significant moral decisions, God tolerates that people cause moral disputes and moral evil when rejecting His moral law.

The second question was, “Why did God create this world when He knew that so many people would reject His moral law and cause moral evil?” The answer to this question comes from the biblical truth that, when creating the world, God desired that human beings obey Him (Genesis 2–3). God’s wish is still that everyone responds positively to His moral law and increases moral good (Psalm 37:31; 119:3, Romans 1–2, Roman 13:8, James 2:8–9, 1 John 3:4).

It is plausible that God chose a world with an optimal balance between positive and negative responses to His moral law, which implies an optimal balance between moral good and moral evil. Also, because of certain counterfactuals of creature freedom, God could not actualize a world where people only responded positively to objective moral law. In order to have a world without moral disputes and moral evil, God would have to create automata. God preferred to make beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes respond negatively to His moral law. The benefits of those who freely decide to act according to God's moral law, generating moral good, should not be precluded by those who reject God’s moral law and cause moral evil. God provided enough revelation of His moral law so any person with properly functioning cognitive capabilities could respond positively to God's moral law if he or she so desired.

Answering the third question, “Why did God not create a world in which everyone freely agrees with His moral law and would so avoid moral evil?” it must be said that God could not create such a world because there are no such persons that would always freely agree with His

moral law and would so avoid moral evil. In every world feasible for God, people will freely reject His moral law at least once, causing moral disputes and evil. Hence, one causes moral disputes and consequently moral evil because they suffer from transworld corruptibility, and all worlds in which people always react favorably to the moral code may be unobtainable.

Nevertheless, God has actualized a world containing the best possible state of balance between people who respond positively and negatively to His moral law.

Finally, the answers provided above are only possibilities for the questions proposed. These questions aimed to demonstrate that the belief in an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent that is the foundation of morality is not logically inconsistent with the fact that people disagree about moral matters and that such disagreements cause moral evil.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

Perhaps the main objections to objective morality arise from the reality of moral disagreements. When considering moral disputes and their consequences, people can become more resistant to an apologetical approach with moral arguments for God's existence. De facto, moral disputes can cause much harm to people. No serious person will deny that all the murders, rapes, hatred, and cruelty in the world leave the question if there is a universal moral code that people can access. The approach can get even more complicated when Christians argue that in addition to universal morality, there is a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and the source of objective morality due to His perfect moral attributes.

The thesis presented the Christian view of morality that affirms God as the foundation for moral values and duties and that God's moral law is available to all humanity. According to the Bible, both Jews and Gentiles received a revelation of God's power and moral law. God revealed His wrath from heaven against all the moral decay and depravity of people who deny the truth through their wickedness. The thesis explained how Bible teaches that what people may know about God is evident, for God has made it plain to them. Jews indeed received a special revelation of God's moral law while the Gentiles, that is to say, people that are not Jew, received a general revelation of God's moral law. However, both Jews and Gentiles are without excuse for rejecting the moral law that they have revealed and are going to face God's impartial justice.

Undoubtedly, this is a difficult teaching, and some people prefer to reject the idea of a perfectly good lawgiver that permits moral disputes and moral evil. Such resistance happens because they have the wrong idea that God should always prevent moral disputes that culminate in moral evil because of His omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and moral attributes. Since they do not see divine intervention against these moral disputes, some prefer to reject the

idea of objective morality and the idea of God, embracing the view that a moral standard grounded in God is irrational or logically inconsistent.

The thesis considered that moral disagreements are phenomena that need explanation. When a believer shares the Christian moral theory, those who are aware of moral disagreements can ask, “Why did God not provide special revelation of His moral law to all persons since they would have responded positively to the objective moral law if they had been adequately educated about it?” More deeply, “Why did God create this world when He knew that so many people would reject His moral law and cause moral evil?” They can even more profoundly ask, “Why did God not create a world where everyone freely agrees with His moral law and would avoid moral evil?”

Such questions suggest that the defense of objective morality and God as the Lawgiver may seem irrational. In order to establish a logical and philosophical approach, the present thesis proposed what one may call “the logical problem of moral disagreement,” which considered the analysis of logical inconsistency between the claim that God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and the source of morality together with the reality of moral disagreements that culminates in moral evil.

The analysis of logical inconsistency presented in this thesis followed the methodology developed by the American Christian Philosopher Alvin Planting in his Free Will Defense and some later improvements, like the one proposed by the Philosopher Richard Otte. This thesis considered the same methodology but aimed to provide answers to the logical problem of moral disagreement. Following the Free Will Defense model, it was necessary to find a proposition that, together with the propositions below, would make this set logically consistent. Many

propositions were evaluated in the thesis, which helped clarify some points of the Christian doctrine regarding God's nature, creative power, and human nature.

The core of the free will defense is the thesis that God could not have created a universe with moral good or as much moral good as this world has without creating a world with moral evil due to individuals' free will. When creating beings with free will, God allows the people to accept or reject His moral law freely, provoking moral good and sometimes moral disputes and consequently moral evil. Moreover, God may have a good reason for creating a world with some moral disagreements if people respond negatively to His moral law, even though it is not God's desire.

Free creatures can frustrate God's absolute good intentions for them. However, God's conditional intentions cannot be so frustrated because they are based on God's middle knowledge. God's conditional intention is to permit many actions on the part of free creatures which He does not absolutely will; but in His infinite wisdom, God so orders which states of affairs obtain that His purposes are achieved despite and even through the sinful, free choices of creatures. God thus providentially arranges for everything that does happen by either willing or permitting it, and He causes everything to happen insofar as He concurs with the decisions of free creatures in producing their effects; yet, He does so in such a way as to preserve freedom and contingency.<sup>206</sup>

Considering that moral disputes are the result of people's rejection of God's moral law that everyone can access, the thesis defended that the only way the world could watch so many moral disagreements and moral evil is if there is a perfect standard by which it can be judged to be out of an expected standard, causing moral evil and suffering. The very perception and

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<sup>206</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 241.

discomfort about moral evil and suffering from moral disputes make sense only if there is a standard of goodness by which something is known to be wrong and evil. Moral disagreements are impossible without an absolute moral standard by which both sides can be measured. If there is no standard, both sides of every moral dispute are right. Moral opposites cannot both be right. For example, “Hitler was an evil man” vs. “Hitler was not an evil man” cannot be confirmed in the same sense. Unless there is an objective moral standard by which Hitler's actions can be weighed, we cannot know that he was evil.

The biblical data reveals God's expectation that both Jews and Gentiles would respond positively to the revelation He provided about His moral law. So, while God created free creatures, He cannot force or determine them to do what is morally correct. Because if He does, people are not truly free; they do not do what is good on their own. To create beings capable of moral virtue, He must also make creatures capable of moral evil, and He cannot give them the freedom to do evil while also preventing them from doing so.<sup>207</sup>

According to numerous passages in the Bible, God's total goal is for no one, Jew or Gentile, to disagree with the revelation of His moral law they received. However, it is not God's scope of power to control how free beings would behave in any given circumstances.<sup>208</sup> It seems that God's scope of power and will was the creation of human beings free concerning a given action. That is to say that people are free to perform specific actions and free to refrain from performing them.

Moreover, this thesis concludes that moral disagreements are not a defeater to the moral theory defended by Christian Theism. Additionally, moral disputes among peers and cultures do

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<sup>207</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 29.

<sup>208</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 241.

not prove that the belief in the all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing God is irrational. The thesis demonstrated that God could not create or actualize a world in which all people would always freely decide to respond positively to His moral law and prevent moral disputes and moral evil. Additionally, the thesis defended that God's actualization of the world depends on counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Alternatively, this thesis presented a model of free will defense that does not rely on the reality of freedom's counterfactuals, as this is a very contentious topic and the source of many criticisms of Plantinga's free will defense.

Finally, it was argued that this defense was ultimately successful. Rather than disproving objective morality and a morally perfect Being, moral disputes in the world presupposes a perfect moral standard grounded in a perfectly moral being. Additionally, this case for the Christian view of morality in the face of moral disagreements may be quite plausible both as a defense and as a theodicy. Indeed, that may help encourage an apologetic approach and evangelism: it is the Christian duty to show the evidence for a universal moral code and a Divine Lawgiver and human beings' sinful condition before God. Christians can then announce the good news of the person and work of Jesus, that died for their sins and offered them eternal life together with God.

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