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MERE CHRISTIAN THEISM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL:
TOWARD A TRINITARIAN PERICHORETIC
THEODICY

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APPROVAL SHEET

MERE CHRISTIAN THEISM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL:
TOWARD A TRINITARIAN PERICHORETIC
THEODICY

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Date: 6/29/2015
To my dad, Paul Campbell

Thank you for first introducing me to Jesus so many years ago. I owe you much gratitude for setting an example of Christ-like service.

To my wife, Debbie, and children, Abby, Caedmon, and Caleb

It was your kindness, encouragement, and love that gave me great joy and kept me going. You deserve much more than my words could ever express.

To my father-in-law, Bob Bragg

Though you’ve had your bout with suffering, I will see you again one day, my friend, in the renewed heavens and earth, where we shall experience no more sickness, pain, or sorrow. We will dwell together in that country—Sweet Beulah Land!
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ABSTRACT

There is perhaps no problem confronting Christian theism more than that of the problem from evil. Evil in the world is not merely a problem for the Christian worldview, however, but also for various other metaphysical systems. This project takes up a comparative analysis of four major worldviews—naturalism, pantheism, process panentheism, and theism—and argues that of the four, theism provides not only the best explanation for the phenomena of evil in the world but it also gives an overall thicker worldview response to the challenges that evil presents. But theism in-and-of-itsel is not enough. A specific form of theism is needed—a form of theism that is grounded in the perichoretic relationship of the divine Trinity—that accounts for both God’s aseity and His being essentially loving. Having compared each of the four worldviews and having argued for the need of a Trinitarian concept of God, this project then takes up the challenge of providing a uniquely Christian theodicy, which I have dubbed the Trinitarian Perichoretic Theodicy (TPT). TPT offers a way forward in answering not only the theological/philosophical issues related to the problem from evil but it also provides a framework for responding to those sufferers who have been affected by the presence of evil in the world.
CHAPTER 1: WHY GOD AND EVIL MATTER?

Introduction

There is, perhaps, no problem confronting Christian theism more than the so-called problem of evil. As William Lane Craig acknowledges, “The problem of evil is certainly the greatest obstacle to belief in the existence of God.”¹ For, after all, if God were all-powerful and all-good, why would He allow evil to exist in the world? If He were good, surely He would want to stop any evil that He could. If He were all-powerful there should be nothing keeping Him from eliminating evil in the world. It would seem, then, that God is, if He exists, either unloving or incapable of stopping the evil that we see and experience. This famous objection by David Hume² is by no means the only problem facing the question of God’s existence and evil in the world. Why is there evil at all? Why is God not doing more about evil in the world?

Questions like these stir at our hearts and beg for answers—answers not only to our intellectual inquiries, but also to the existential realities that come along with the existence of evil in the world. In the midst of their existential plight, people find themselves asking, “Why did God allow this to happen to me or to this group of people?” When looking back to such events as September 11, 2001, when many Americans died because of the attacks of terrorists, or natural disasters that devastate whole people groups, as in the events of the tsunami of 2004 off the coast of the Indian Ocean, hurricane Katrina in 2005, the earthquake of Pakistan and Kashmir in 2005, and, most recently, the typhoon that hit the Philippines in 2013, people are left asking “Where


was God in the midst of all of these tragedies?” How should Christians respond? How are Christians to make sense of all of this in light of their own convictions about God and His relationship to the world? Moreover, will God make right the wrongs that take place in His good creation?

On top of an already complicated issue, it must be taken into consideration that not just one problem of evil exists. There is the philosophical/theological problem of evil as well as the existential/religious problem of evil. One may also include related issues such as the question of Hell and divine hiddenness. All of these relate to the larger problem of evil. Regarding the philosophical/theological problem, as John Feinberg rightly points out: one’s conception of God plays a significant role in how one answers the question of evil. For not all concepts of God are equal. Even among people within the same general worldview, there are substantial differences between their ideas of God. Which view of God, if God indeed exists, is the correct view of God? Is there any reason to think that one conception of God is better than another when considering the problem of evil in the world? The question of God’s nature is especially important to Christian theists. Unlike Jews or Muslims, who hold to God as one person, Christians believe that God is tri-personal. Is there any reason to think that God is one way over the other? What ultimate difference, if any, does it make if God is mono-personal or tri-personal?

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3 This point will be worked out more fully in chapter one. It will suffice now to simply state, briefly, there are different problems of evil. Yet, one may even question the bundling together of the existential, religious, and emotional as referring to ‘one’ distinct problem.

The problem of evil not only affects theists of every stripe, but all people who have been confronted by the tragedies and horrors of evil in the world. Each worldview⁵ must confront the reality and problems brought about by evil—problems that touch every tangent of our finite earthly existence. While each worldview provides an answer to such questions, not all worldview responses are on par with one other. Some worldviews provide a thicker response to the question of evil than others.⁶ The problem of evil raises questions related to the meaning and purpose of life and whether or not this life is all that there is. Is there any meaning to our finite existence or to the suffering we experience in the world? Is this all there is to life? Should we echo the words of the Apostle Paul and suggest that if this life is all there is, then “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”⁷ As theologian Paul Tillich reminds us, each one of us stands in between being and non-being. We all teeter on the edge of life and death.⁸ But even if this life is all that there is, can a person find meaning and purpose in the face of suffering? For a serious seeker, she must contend with the question of what constitutes a thick worldview response to evil and how such a response differs from a thin worldview response. What criteria should one use when analyzing worldview responses to evil in the world? Which worldviews are even live options in the face of evil?

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⁵ While worldviews are as prevalent as there are human persons, there are, nevertheless, general features that places people within the confines of a broader worldview, mostly in response to how a person answers the question of God and ultimate reality.

⁶ When philosophers speak of “thick” or “thin” with respect to possible worlds or worldviews, they have in mind the extent to which a person finds value, meaning, and purpose within that world. A “thin” world is one where there is no objective value, meaning, or purpose; whereas a “thick” world is one that is teeming with such attributes. For a fuller discussion, see J. P. Moreland, Kingdom Triangle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 26-29.

⁷ I Corinthians 15:32. Some consider Paul to have in mind Mender’s comedy Thais.

Any adequate response to the problem of evil must answer such questions as the ones raised above. How does Christian theism fare with such questions in comparison to other worldviews? Does Christianity have within it, not only the resources to present a rational explanation for why evil exists in the world and an answer to what God is doing about evil (or, at least, why He allows it), but also the capacity to provide a response to the existential dimension of evil in the world? In this project I will argue that, in comparison to other major worldviews, Christianity provides a thick response, not only to the intellectual problem of evil, but also to the existential/religious problem as well. In addition, Christian theism provides a thicker response than other theistic worldviews. Particularly, within the central teachings of Christian theism, and especially the uniquely Christian teachings such as the tri-personal nature of the Christian God, the incarnation and resurrection of the Son of God, and the Kingdom of God, Christians have a robust answer to the problem of evil. I concur with William Lane Craig when he says, “As a Christian theist, I’m persuaded that the problem of evil, terrible as it is, does not in the end constitute a disproof of the existence of God. On the contrary, in fact, I think that Christian theism is man’s last best hope of solving the problem of evil.”

**Purpose and Method**

Why another work on the problem of evil? Has not much ink been spilled over this one topic already? Can anything new be said that has not already been said? In response to this challenge, there are at least four reasons why this work is needed.

First, while it is true that much has been written on this topic, even within the last thirty years or so, the problem of evil still remains a significant challenge to Christian theism. As noted

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9 Craig, “Problem of Evil.”
earlier, evil affects everyone in some way or another, and it is not just a challenge to Christianity, but to all worldviews. This work, in part, will consider how the Christian worldview compares with other major worldview systems in making sense of evil in the world. As will be argued, other worldviews, when confronted with evil, have difficulties of their own.

A second purpose of this present work is to provide a uniquely Christian response to the problem of evil. Philosophers of religion have largely led the charge in confronting the intellectual challenges brought on by the various arguments from evil. Though there have been some significant attempts at answering the existential problem from evil, as well, this area has not received nearly as much attention. Regarding the intellectual problem, Alvin Plantinga, in his monumental work, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, has largely put to rest the so-called logical problem from evil, so much so, that hardly anyone, including most atheists, accepts it as a real threat to theism. Even its more modest cousin, the evidential problem from evil, has received much attention by skeptical theists, such as William Alston and Stephen Wykstra, and a

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variety of other prominent philosophers.\textsuperscript{14} But where have the theologians been? This is not to say that no theologians have given the topic of evil due consideration;\textsuperscript{15} but, in large, theologians have been somewhat absent, or, at least, the ones who have been writing have largely ignored the work of philosophers of religion. What is said of theologians can also be said by-in-large of biblical scholars.\textsuperscript{16} But philosophers of religion, particularly those who are convinced of the truth claims of Christianity, are not entirely off the hook. Many of them have done their defense within the realm of a generic theism. How do we get from a generic theism to a more distinctly Christian theism in responding to evil? Part of my aim here is to take seriously Alvin Plantinga’s charge, in his highly influential essay, “Advice to Christian Philosophers.”\textsuperscript{17} Plantinga writes:

Christian philosophers, however, are the philosophers of the Christian community; and it is part of their task as Christian philosophers to serve the Christian community. But the Christian community has its own questions, its own concerns, its own topics for investigation, its own agenda, and its own research program. Christian philosophers ought not merely take their inspiration from what’s going on at Princeton or Berkley or Harvard, attractive and scintillating as that may be; for perhaps those questions and topics are not the ones, or not the only ones, they should be thinking about as the philosophers of the Christian


community. There are other philosophical topics the Christian community must work at, and other topics the Christian community must work at philosophically. And obviously, Christian philosophers are the ones who must do the philosophical work involved. If they devote their best efforts to the topics fashionable in the non-Christian philosophical world, they will neglect a crucial and central part of their task as Christian philosophers. What is needed here is more independence, more autonomy with respect to the projects and concerns of the non-theistic philosophical world.\textsuperscript{18}

Elsewhere he continues,

But this means that the Christian philosophical community need not devote all of its efforts to attempting to refute opposing claims and/or to arguing for its own claims, in each case from premises accepted by the bulk of the philosophical community at large. It ought to do this, indeed, but it ought to do more. For if it does only this, it will neglect a pressing philosophical task: systematizing, deepening, clarifying Christian thought on these topics. So here again: my plea is for the Christian philosopher, the Christian philosophical community, to display, first, more independence and autonomy: we needn’t take as our research projects just those projects that currently enjoy widespread popularity; we have our own questions to think about. Secondly, we must display more integrity. We must not automatically assimilate what is current or fashionable or popular by way of philosophical opinion and procedures; for much of it comports ill with Christian ways of thinking. And finally, we must display more Christian self-confidence or courage or boldness. We have a perfect right to our pre-philosophical views: why, therefore, should we be intimidated by what the rest of the philosophical world thinks plausible or implausible?\textsuperscript{19}

As a part of the Christian philosophical community, the problem of evil should, no less, be considered from a uniquely Christian perspective. As Plantinga argues, the Christian community has its own questions about the problems arising from evil in the world. A question I want to consider in this present work is whether generic theism can provide the kind of robust answer to evil that is needed. Moreover, I want to consider how the unique doctrines of Christianity, such as the Trinity, incarnation, resurrection of Jesus, and kingdom of God play a vital role in answering the problem of evil. Along the same lines, how does the reality of evil in the world shape every area of Christian theology? Lastly, I want to consider, from the Christian

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 298-299.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 312.
perspective, what it is that God is doing about evil in the world? How does God’s activity in the world, according to the Christian worldview, compare, say, with other theistic worldviews?

Thirdly, this project aims to be an attempt at constructive theology, or, perhaps, analytic theology, and integrative in nature, bringing together the best insights from theologians, philosophers, and biblical scholars on the problem of evil. Sadly, philosophers are often unsatisfied with the work of theologians; whereas, biblical scholars and theologians often think they can begin and do their disciplines apart from philosophy. The truth is, as a part of the Christian community, all of these disciplines are needed and are working toward a common objective. This is all the more the case when considering the problem of evil.

Fourth, and lastly, this work serves to bring together a response to both the intellectual and existential problems of evil. Philosophers have rightly understood these two problems as distinct and that we should approach them differently; however, they have done so almost at the risk of severing the two. While evil raises significant intellectual problems for the theist, it is also a very real existential feature of reality that the theist must deal with. For any worldview that seeks to confront the problem of evil, it must do so in a multi-dimensional way. It must not only meet the intellectual demands raised by the problem of evil, but it should also provide a response to the existential dimension. Christian theism, as I shall argue, provides a robust answer to both dimensions of the problem of evil.

So how might one go about such a task? There are four legs to my approach. First, I begin by comparing different worldview responses to the problem of evil. While there are many views on God’s nature and relationship to the world, there are at least three, understood in generally broad terms, which serve as “live options”: theism, pantheism, and panentheism. The God of theism is typically understood to be personal, creator of all things, omnipotent,
omniscient, omnibenevolent, eternal, and the like. God, for theists, exists independently of the world. As the Creator of all things, the world depends on God and not the other way around. Pantheists, on the other hand, generally hold to God as both impersonal and identical (in some sense or another) with the world. But there is a third option—panentheism. Panentheism is a mixture of theism and pantheism. Panentheists understand God as, in some sense, dependent on the world for it actualization, but, yet, God transcends the world. Taken along with naturalism, theism, pantheism, and panentheism become the major worldview contenders for explaining evil in the world. Each of the three theological worldviews has quite a different take on the nature and existence of evil and on what God is doing (or can do) about evil in the world. But naturalists, too, must explain evil’s place in the world.

Having argued for theism as the best explanation for the phenomena of evil in the world, I move to the second leg of my method—consideration on whether or not generic theism is a viable option for answering the questions raised by evil in the world. By “generic theism” I have in mind the classical concept of God held by Jews, Muslims, Christians, and certain African and Hindu religions. According to this view, God is the omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, eternal, and personal, uncaused Creator of all things. The term “generic” does not mean how people commonly take it today, as if the thing in question is “cheap” or “of poor quality”; rather, generic connotes the idea of something being “wide-spread” or “common.” In this case, generic theism means the common or wide-spread understanding of God, one that many theistic worldviews could adopt. It would be helpful to clarify up front that I do not fundamentally disagree with this understanding of God. Thinking of God in such a way helps to bring into

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20 Though, even here, some theists may not emphasize all of the specified attributes above in order to answer why God allows evil. For example, adherents of a view such as finite godism limit God’s omnipotence in order to accommodate for certain features of their worldview.
sharper focus certain core features of what God is like. However, generic theism is, as I will argue, inadequate in providing a robust answer to the question of evil in the world. The Christian concept of God, a God who is essentially tri-personal, provides the kind of explanatory power needed to make sense of not only the intellectual problem of evil, but also the religious or existential problem.

The third leg will examine various theodicies that have been proposed to justify why God allows evil in the world. Many, if not most, of the theodicies considered provide valuable insights for why God allows evil. But in-and-of-themselves these theodicies fall short, again, in providing proper explanatory power. Most of the theodicies considered adopt a greater good hypothesis, that is to say, that evils are in some sense necessary in order to bring about a greater good in God’s overarching purposes. As will be argued, there are problems with taking this route for the Christian theist, namely, that it requires 1) an overly meticulous form of sovereignty, often taking away human responsibility and 2) that there are no gratuitous evils in the world. Lastly, most of the theodicies considered can be used to work with a great number of theisms, and do not do much by way of arguing specifically for Christian theism. This leads to the last part of my proposal.

In the fourth leg of this project I will attempt to tease out a new theodicy. A theodicy is an attempt at justifying God’s goodness in the face of evil in the world.21 I am hesitant to use the word “theodicy” in describing my aim in this project, since theodicies are often viewed as inadequate or incapable of providing a satisfying answer to all of the evils that we encounter, and since I believe I am doing more than offering a theodicy. According to C. Stephen Layman, when offering a response to evil, the theist has four argumentative strategies available: 1) offer a

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theodicy; 2) show that the arguments from evil against theism are flawed; 3) argue that, though evil counts against theism, natural theology and religious experience warrant theism and thus “override” the evidence of evil against theism; and 4) argue that though theism does not answer all of the evils that take place in the world, it provides an explanation that is as good or better than its metaphysical competitors. Layman calls this last approach “The Comparative Response.”22 This work will seek to forge (1) and (4) as an argumentative strategy. After all, the Christian worldview, worked out from reflection on the pages of the Bible, is itself, in a real sense, a response to evil.23 This point is often neglected in discussions related to the problem of evil. But what makes the proposal here different from other theodicies? The chief difference is that the theodicy I am proposing is one that examines the comprehensive response of a worldview system, namely the Christian worldview, to the problem of evil. I am aware that there is not just one Christian theism and that, even among the major divisions of Christianity, such as Protestants or Catholics, there are divisions upon divisions. This approach, then, will be something like putting forth a mere Christian theism. My goal is not to argue for one stripe of Christian theism over another, but, rather, to look at the chief features of the Christian worldview, beliefs that are shared by most all Christian traditions. It is inevitable in a project like this to emphasize certain beliefs (or twists on beliefs) over others, and there is no doubt that, perhaps, my own traditional biases will come out. I will do all that I can to keep such biases in check. It may be that if this project is successful other Christian traditions will have to modify or adjust some of the aspects of this proposal to fit with their own traditions.


23 I owe this insight to John Hick, who, in *Evil and the God of Love*, attempts to provide a Christian theodicy. See also N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*.
In certain ways, the theodicy that I am here proposing, which I have dubbed, the *Trinitarian Perichoretic Theodicy*, is an extension of the free will theodicy/defense, though it will certainly contain important elements from various other theodicies, such as soul-making theodicies and natural law/creation order theodicies. Why trinitarian? That a theodicy begin with the Trinity is important for various reasons. First, the Christian view of God as a tri-unity of persons sets it apart from the various other theistic contenders, in that, God, as a tri-personal being, is, in His very nature, essentially good and loving, which, as I shall argue, is a harder thesis to defend if God is merely unitarian or one person. Second, if God is tri-personal, as Christians believe, then at the center of all reality is a loving relationship among persons. As will be argued, that God exists as a tri-unity of persons in loving relationship has explanatory power for 1) why God created humans with certain creaturely freedoms, 2) why human creaturely communities, and the rest of creation, too, require significant interdependence and inter-relationality for things to work properly, 3) why evil works against such features in God’s good world, and 4) what God is doing about evil in the world (particularly through the work of the incarnate and raised Son and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit).

The Christian concept of perichoresis also plays a significant part in the theodicy that I am putting forth. Perichoresis is an ancient Christian doctrine, which expresses the interpenetrating relationship between the persons of the Trinity. Some of the Church Fathers, particularly from the Eastern tradition, have understood the notion of perichoresis as giving insight not only to the Trinity, but also to the incarnation and life in the Kingdom.24 This project

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will especially consider the connections between perichoresis and the Trinity, firstly, and, secondly, perichoresis with respect to the Kingdom of God.

**Key Terms and Concepts**

As with any philosophical or theological work, it is of upmost importance to consider key terminology in order to avoid ambiguity or equivocation. Below I seek to establish parameters for thinking about some of the key concepts surrounding discussions on the problem from evil. I give consideration to the various kinds and types of evil (e.g., moral, natural, and gratuitous) as well as the often neglected distinction between pain and suffering. While philosophers and theologians are often careful to distinguish between moral, natural, and gratuitous evils, that is not always the case with respect to pain and suffering. Generally, the latter are often lumped together without giving any significant consideration to the possible distinctions between them. Lastly, I consider what theists mean when they speak of God and creation as being good.

**Evil, Kinds of Evil, and the Good**

When asked to define evil, our response might be like that of Augustine’s on time: “If no one asks me, I know; but if I wish to explain it to one who asks, I know not.”


Some have concluded that evil is indefinable, much like the word “person.” We know a person when we see one, even if we cannot arrive at a clear or concise definition of what constitutes personhood. Perhaps the same is true of evil. Perhaps we do not have sufficient conditions for classifying something as evil. Nevertheless, even if that is the case, it does not mean that we have no
parameters or boundaries for considering just what it means to call something evil. In what follows, I seek to sketch out some parameters for thinking about evil.²⁶

Before moving on to a discussion on the nature of evil, it would be helpful to make some preliminary distinctions between different kinds of evil. Philosophers and theologians have recognized that evil comes in two forms: moral evil and natural evil. Moral evils are such that the evil produced is the result of a moral agent. Murder, rape, genocide, and bio-chemical warfare are all examples of evil produced by a moral agent. Natural evils, on the other hand, refer to those evils that come about through some kind of non-human means. When human (or animal) life has been devastated by such natural events as hurricanes, tornados, or tsunamis, such is classified as natural evil. Natural evils may also come about through disease. Some philosophers even classify certain unintentional actions brought by human agents as belonging to natural evil. An example of such a case might include a child injured due to dashing out in front of an oncoming vehicle. In such a case the driver would not be held morally culpable, since the action was not intentional on the part of the driver.²⁷ It may also be helpful to consider that some evils, which appear to be a result of natural processes, are, rather, the result of moral agency. Examples of this variety include evils caused by pollution or forest fires. One final category is the notion of gratuitous or horrendous evils. Gratuitous evils are those kinds of evils that are seemingly pointless to us. They seem to serve no purpose for why they occur in the world. There seems to be no justification for why God might allow such evils.

²⁶ For now I only deal with the Christian understanding of evil. I will flesh out other perspectives when examining how the adherents of other worldviews think about evil in chapter one.

Classifying evils as “moral,” “natural,” or “gratuitous” sheds some light on thinking about evil, but such a classification does nothing by way of telling us just what evil is. How should we understand the nature of evil? Christians have generally sided with Augustine’s view that evil is privatio boni—the “absence” or “privation” of good. In the *Enchiridion*, Augustine described *privatio boni* as follows:

In the bodies of animals, disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils which were present—namely, the diseases and wounds—go away from the body and dwell elsewhere: they altogether cease to exist; for the wound or disease is not a substance but a defect in the fleshly substance—the flesh itself being a substance, and therefore something good, of which those evils—that is, privations of the good which we call health—are accidents. Just in the same way, what are called vices in the soul are nothing but privations of natural good. And when they are cured, they are not transferred elsewhere: when they cease to exist in the healthy soul, they cannot exist anywhere else.

As Augustine worked out his views on evil, he had one eye on neo-Platonic thought and the other on the narrative of Genesis. From Genesis, Augustine understood that God created all things good and that the whole taken together was “very good.” Evil, for Augustine, is something that exists in reality; however, it does not have being of its own. Much like a parasite needs its host in order to remain alive, evil, for Augustine, could not exist apart from the good. Working from within a Neo-Platonic framework, Augustine equated being with goodness. A thing that it is a good without any evil is considered to be a “perfect good.” An example of such a good would be God, who is “supremely and unchangeably good.” Yet, because God is supremely or

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28 Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 11

29 Ibid.

30 This perspective on evil is not new to Augustine, but was promoted by other Church Fathers, such as Athanasius, who saw evil as “non-being.” Evil is, says Athanasius, “the negation and antithesis of good.” See Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 1.4.


32 Ibid., 12.
unchangeably good, He, unlike all created goods, is incapable of corruption. Goods that have been corrupted are “faulty” or “imperfect” goods.\(^{33}\) But because God created all things good, as put forth by the Genesis narrative, no particular thing can exist and be completely corrupt at the same time; otherwise, it would cease to be.\(^{34}\)

Philosopher of religion, John Hick, who also stands broadly within the Christian tradition, finds Augustine’s view wanting. Hick, in *Evil and the God of Love*, seems to affirm the biblical teaching that God is supremely good, and that creation itself, too, is good, in a derivative way. Yet, he questions whether Augustine (and Aquinas) too readily accepts the neo-Platonic equation of being with goodness, going beyond the simple affirmation of Scripture.\(^{35}\)

Augustine’s defense of holding to the neo-Platonic equation of good with being rests in his acceptance of the greater chain of being, “the claim that certain characteristics, which are necessarily present in different degrees in every existent thing—principally ‘measure, form, and order’,—are intrinsically good. To possess these characteristics is to be a part of the continuum of entities constituting the created universe, so that to exist is, as such, to be good.”\(^{36}\) However, says Hick, Augustine provides no philosophical arguments for accepting this principle; rather, it is a holdover from the neo-Platonic view of reality. Further, claims Hick, “there appears to be no basis within Christian theology for affirming the intrinsic goodness of existence in any other than the biblical sense that God wills and values the world that he has created.”\(^{37}\) For Hick, to affirm

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 171.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
that creation is good is only to affirm that it “is willed and valued by God.” But such an
affirmation of creation’s goodness, says Hick, “does not entail any metaphysical doctrine of the
identity of being and goodness; nor does there appear to be any adequate reason to adopt such a
d Doctrine.”

So how are we to think of evil? Hick believes that one must distinguish between the
theological insight that “evil is the going wrong of something good,” which he thinks follows
from the Christian teaching on God and creation, and evil as “nothingness or nonbeing.” The
Augustinian approach to evil, however, is inadequate, in that, it does not fully capture evil’s true
nature in light of human experience. There is no doubt that evil is a reality for Hick. It is both a
“positive” and “powerful” element of human experience. “Empirically,” says Hick, “it is not
merely the absence of something else but a reality with its own distinctive and often terrifying
quality of power.” It does not take much reflection to see the limitations and inadequacy of the
privation understanding of evil as an empirical description. Hick argues,

What we call evil in nature can, it is true, often be regarded as consisting in the corruption or
perversion or disintegration of something which, apart from such disruption, is good. . . .
Volcanic eruptions, droughts, tornadoes, hurricanes, and planetary collisions can perhaps
likewise be regarded as breakdowns in some imagined ideal ordering of nature. In all such
cases the evil state of affairs can plausibly be seen as the collapse of a good state of affairs,
and as tending toward non-existence, at least in the relative sense of the dissolution of a
previously established arrangement of life or matter. But does such an account really lay
bare that aspect of the event or of the situation that makes us call it evil? Do we regard a
volcanic eruption, for example, as evil considered simply as a loss of a previous ‘measure,
form and order’? Do we not, on the contrary, regard it as evil only if it causes harm to
human, or at least to sentient life? Is the eruption of a volcano an uninhabited island, or
(assuming it to be uninhabited) on Venus, an evil? Or again, is the natural decay of
vegetation in virgin jungle to be accounted evil? Or the burning up of a star or the

38 Ibid., 172.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 180.
41 Ibid., 55.
fragmentation of a meteor a million million light years distant from us in space? If not, the
quality of evil is not attributed to physical disintegration as such, but only in so far as it
impinges deleteriously upon the realm of the personal, or at least upon the sphere of animal
life. It is in fact not loss of ‘measure, form and order’ *per se* that is evil, but only this
considered as a cause of pain and suffering.\(^{42}\)

It is not so much, then, that natural occurrences, such as tornados or tsunamis, are evils in and of
themselves, but, rather, how such events move into the realm of the personal or sphere of animal
life, causing pain, suffering, and destruction. But even in those cases of evils caused by human
agency, it seems that the privation view is all the more inadequate of a response. It is not merely
the devaluation or absence of the good, but “it can be a terrifying positive force in the world.”\(^{43}\)
Hick explains, “Cruelty is not merely an extreme absence of kindness, but is something with a
demonic power of its own. Hatred is not merely lack of love, or malevolence merely in minimum
degree of goodwill.”\(^{44}\) Moral evils, it would seem, go beyond “merely privations of their
corresponding moral goods.”\(^{45}\)

Given Hick’s critique of Augustine’s notion of the privation view, how should one think
of evil? Is there any hope for the privationist view? In their essay, “Evil is Privation,” Bill Anglin
and Stewart Goetz argue that privationists are at least minimally committed to the belief that
“evil is evil just insofar as there is a privation of something which ought to be there.”\(^{46}\) This
seems right, to me at least, but it does nothing by the way of answering Hick’s objection that
something like hatred seems to go beyond a *mere lack* of love. If a theist is going to maintain the

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 55-56.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 57.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

privation view, it must, at least, be able to accommodate Hick’s objection regarding the positive nature of evil in the world. Perhaps, reflection on the goodness of God and the goodness of creation will provide some insights, here.

Most theists recognize that God is essentially good. This is especially the case for Christian theists. Christians, along with Jews, hold to a further claim that all that God made is good. At the climax of the creation account in Genesis 1, we read that God pronounced all He had made was “very good.” Therefore, in working out a view of evil, Christians, and, perhaps, Jews too, will want to preserve both God’s goodness and the goodness of what God had made, something that the privation view does well. As noted earlier, God is essentially good; creation, on the other hand, is good in a derivative sense, in that it is contingently so. By saying that creation is “derivatively” and “contingently” good, I do not mean that God could have created something evil, but only that God, who is the creator of all things, is the only being who is good necessarily. Any other thing that exists is dependent on God for its existence, thus contingent. Those things that are derivatively good are so because they find their source in God, who is necessarily good.

But what, here, do Christians mean by “good”? Thomas Morris suggests a two-fold claim for understanding God’s goodness. First, a theist might think of God as being wholly good. By this, the Christian theist means that God has no defects or blemishes. As Morris points out, this understanding of God’s goodness means that “God never does anything which is ultimately wrong or evil” and that “His character contains no flaw, and he is subject to no moral

47 Genesis 1:31.
Secondly, as previously noted, *God is necessarily good.* To speak of God as necessarily good means that “God is so firmly entrenched in goodness, or alternately, that goodness is so entrenched in God, that it is strictly impossible for there to be in him any sort of flaw or defect,” that is to say, “he is utterly invulnerable to evil.” It goes to follow that if God is essentially good, then those actions which God perform must also be good.

But how are we to understand the goodness of creation? Biblical scholars and theologians often debate on whether interpreters should understand Scripture, on certain issues, as using “being” language or “functional” language. In his recent book, *The Lost World of Genesis One,* Hebrew and Ancient Near-Eastern scholar, John Walton, builds a case that the Genesis one narrative is one of “functional” ontology and not “material” ontology. When pondering existence, we can think of something as existing in more than one way, says Walton. For example, as I look at my coffee cup, I think of its material composition. I consider the various types of material used to compose my cup, the various elements within the paint, the smoothness of the edges, and so on. However, I can also look at my coffee cup and think in a different way on why it exists as it does. What is its purpose? Why is it shaped as it is? The former understanding of my coffee cup has to do with questions concerning material ontology; whereas the latter has to do with questions concerning its functional ontology. Walton argues that people from the ancient near-eastern world were far less concerned about material existence as they

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49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God,* 133.
were about functional existence. Much of the problem for modern interpreters has to do with how we moderns view ontology. Walton explains:

When we speak of cosmic ontology these days, it can be seen that our culture views existence, and therefore meaning, in material terms. Our material view of ontology in turn determines how we think about creation, and it is easy to see how. If ontology defines the terms of existence, and creation means to bring something into existence, then one’s ontology sets the parameters by which one thinks about creation. Creation of a chair would be a very different process than the creation of a company. Since in our culture we believe that existence is material, we consequently believe that to create something means to bring its material properties into existence. Thus our discussions of origins tend to focus on material origins.  

However, “people in the ancient world,” argues Walton, “believed that something existed not by virtue of its material properties, but by virtue of its having a function in an ordered system.” By “ordered system,” we are not speaking in scientific terms; rather, it has to do with “an ordered system in human terms, that is, in relation to society and culture.” Walton continues,

In this sort of functional ontology, the sun does not exist in virtue of its material properties, or even in its function as a burning ball of gas. Rather it exists by virtue of the role that it has in its sphere of existence, particularly in the way that it functions for humankind and human society. . . . In a functional ontology, to bring something into existence would require giving it a function or a role in an ordered system, rather than giving it material properties. Consequently, something could be manufactured physically but still not “exist” if it has not become functional.

Walton’s view of the Genesis 1 narrative is controversial, since many theologians today still think of the narrative of Genesis 1 in terms of having to do with material origins. My purpose, here, is not to solve the debate between “function” and “material” ontology in the ancient world;

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53 Ibid., 26.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.
rather, it is to bring Walton’s insight on ontology into our discussion on the nature of the
goodness of creation.

When we think of the goodness of God’s creation, perhaps much of what the biblical
writers had in mind had to do with, not merely the substance of the thing made, which
privationist theories have often placed emphasis on, but also the function given to that thing that
was made. This insight, it seems, is one that those who promote the privation theory of evil often
fail to emphasize. Evil does not have to do with the corruption of the thing only but also a
disruption to the order and function that God assigned to certain things within creation.

So as not to equivocate on terms, confusing Walton’s emphasis on function within an
ordered system with how I’m going to use the notion in this project, it may be helpful to think of
God establishing more than one order—or, perhaps better, distinctions within that one order—the
natural order of creation and the moral order of creation. By natural order, I mean the order in
which God established the world or universe to function in a certain way. Here, one might
include such things as the laws of nature, or, more accurately, law-like regulating principles.
These regulating principles generally describe the ‘goings on’ of the universe, such as the need
for things like gravity or plate tectonics crashing into one another in order for the world to
operate as it does. If, indeed, God created the universe to operate in such a way, then, perhaps,
when the text describes all that God had made as good, it may include such things. Now, surely,
the biblical writers did not have a scientific worldview when they wrote about the goodness of
creation, nor did they posit such things as law-like regulating principles behind the ‘goings on’ in
the world (at least not as far as we know); nevertheless, they did understand that reality
functioned in an orderly way, and this was the result of God’s bringing it about to do so. The
emphasis on goodness, then, is not so much on the “how” God brought about order within
creation (whatever that may include), but, rather, that there is order to the way things are to function in the world that God has made. That stones fall to the ground when dropped or waves crash into the shore of a beach are examples of the goodness of creation, because these are part of the fabric of the natural created order as God intended.

Much of the same could be said with respect to the moral ordering of things. The moral order of creation has to do with God’s establishing that some of His creatures with a capacity to perform certain morally significant actions are to function in a certain way within the larger framework of the natural order. There is a moral fabric that runs through the whole of God’s intentions for these creaturely moral agents to operate within such a world. Goodness, here, then, refers to the order in which moral agents are intended to function within the world that God has made. When humans and, perhaps, angels too, comply with how God intended them to function as moral agents, then such is good, since these kinds of things line up with the fabric of the moral order God intended for creation.

Whether Genesis 1 establishes material origins or not is debatable, but Genesis 1 is not the only passage within Scripture which emphasizes that the spacio-temporal universe came into existence ex nihilo.56 Traditionally, Christians have held to the belief that God brought all things into existence out of nothing, using no pre-existing materials to make and form the universe, as Platonists thought and as Process theologians today believe.57 If God created all things, then that which God brought into existence is good. Otherwise, if God created something that was

56 John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16-18; Hebrews 1:2-3, 10-12. Theologians have based the doctrine of creation ex nihilo on arguments from God’s eternity. For an excellent defense of creation ex nihilo, see William Lane Craig and Paul Copan, Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

essentially evil, then God is to be held responsible for the origin of that evil. Further, if, as I have been arguing, goodness in creation refers to, not only the thing created, but also to the ordering of how things are to function, including how moral agents are to function within the larger universe, then an evil is not merely the privation of the good of some “thing,” but can also be ascribed to the absence of some good as it relates to God’s intentions for the created order, particularly the moral order.

Privation, then, would seem to be an important aspect of something being ‘evil’ or having ‘badness’. Here, we might concur with Brian Davies when speaking of our descriptions of something that is evil.

To say that something is bad or in a bad way assumes that we have a sense of what it would be like for it not to be so (just as to say that someone is ill assumes that we have a sense of what it would be like for someone to be well). If ‘good’ is a logically attributive adjective . . it sets a standard for things as we describe them as being bad since its use depends on our understanding of a noun. We do not understand what is being said when told that something is a bad X unless we have a sense of what it would be to be a good X. If rotten apples were the norm, we would not understand what a bad apple is. So we are indeed complaining when calling something bad . . . And in doing so we are, I think, always noting that something is not as good as it could or should be.\textsuperscript{58}

The key in understanding the privationist view of evil is not so much in understanding that the privation of the good in view is the good’s opposite, but, rather, that something is not how it should be. It is out of sorts, so to speak.\textsuperscript{59} So when Hick speaks of hatred as not being merely a lack of love, he is right, since a lack of love might also include something like indifference or greediness. That is not to say, however, that when a person exhibits hatred toward another that nothing is lacking. As Davies rightly notes, we understand that something is a bad X because we have a sense of what some good X looks like. When a person exhibits hatred toward another

\textsuperscript{58} Brian Davies, “Reply to Mark Robson on Evil as Privation,” \textit{New Blackfriars} 94, 1053 (September 2013): 567.

\textsuperscript{59} Perhaps we too readily bifurcate between ontology and morality when it comes to a thing’s goodness.
person, it may be the case that love is lacking, but there might also be other qualities missing, such as a lack of kindness or a desire to bring about unity. But beyond these, hatred toward others breaks into a failure to maintain God’s intentions in keeping with the moral order of creation. We know what it looks like for things like harmony and peace to be exhibited within creation. Hatred is in contrast to and brings about a lack in such an order.

Whether I have answered Hick’s objection or not remains to be seen. Nevertheless, both Hick and the privationist account of evil recognize that evil is a reality in the world. Before finishing this section, it would be helpful to consider one final point. Certain religions like Zoroastrianism, and even some Christians, believe that reality consists of two eternal opposing forces, such as God and Satan. The Christian view has classically rejected this way of thinking, since as noted above, God alone is the creator of all things and a necessary being. Satan, who is a created being and contingent, owes his existence to God, along with any power that he may have. Christians thus reject any notion that evil is eternal or personal and that it is an entity equal to God.

In summary, it seems that we can draw four conclusions about the nature of evil from the Christian perspective: 1) evil is a part of reality and not just an illusion; 2) evil is not a creation of God, nor is it a substance, person, or force; 3) evil cannot exist apart from the good (though it is true that good can exist apart from evil); and 4) evil is the absence, privation, or lack of some good, whether in a thing or in God’s intentions for the moral created order.

Pain and Suffering

In the literature on the problem of evil, too often the words “pain” and “suffering” are used interchangeably. There are, as we shall see, certain important reasons for not equating the two. I would also contend with Eleonore Stump that the problem from evil has more to do with
suffering, and not so much natural evil, since, as she rightly expresses, had there not been any sentient beings who are affected by things such as hurricanes or tsunamis, there would be no cause to raise question about the evils that occur in nature. Even with respect to moral evils, that which we are most concerned with is the suffering that results from the moral actions of human creatures.⁶⁰

Pain, then, can be construed in one of two ways: physical pain and mental pain. Physical pain, as I take it, has to do with our physical equipment and it can occur on a variety of levels or degrees. For example, pricking my finger does not amount to the same sensation of discomfort as breaking my leg. Both experiences result in pain, but not of the same sort or degree.

Mental pain, on the other hand, has to do with those pains that are more emotionally or psychologically oriented. A person can experience mental pain without having any physical sensation whatsoever. Modern day lepers are examples of people who experience mental anguish brought on because of their physical deformities, rejection by the people around them, or their inabilities to accomplish certain daily tasks, yet, they feel no bodily pain. Surgeon and leprosy specialist, Paul Brand, recounts a story of a young girl named Tanya, whose rare genetic defect, commonly known as “congenital indifference to pain,” resulted in her eventually having both legs amputated, the loss of most of her fingers, a lacerated tongue due to an obsessive habit of chewing on it, constant dislocated elbows, and chronic sepsis caused by ulcers on her limbs and appendages. At one point in his book, The Gift of Pain, Brand tells a story of Tanya’s mother finding her as a young child doodling on a piece of paper with what seemed to be red liquid. But to her shock and horror, Tanya had bitten off the tip of her finger and was making designs out of

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her own blood, while all the time going on as if nothing had ever happened to her. Tanya, and many like her, cannot feel pain physically. Their nerve receptors do not function properly. When they do damage to their bodies, they are often not aware of it, resulting in certain deformities because of infection and gangrene, which requires the removal of the person’s limbs or appendages. Yet, their inability to have the physical sensation of pain, nevertheless, causes much mental anguish. In his years of working with lepers, and others with nerve related complications, Brand has concluded that life without physical pain can bring about just as much suffering as a life with it. On this point Brand says, “If I held in my hands the power to eliminate physical pain from the world, I would not exercise it. My work with pain-deprived patients has proved to me that pain protects us from destroying ourselves.” This is not to trivialize the horrible effects of physical pain. Physical pain, if unchecked, “saps physical strength and mental energy, and can come to dominate a person’s entire life.” Yet, for most people, says Brand, we live our lives somewhere between the two extremes of painlessness and chronic illness.

Despite its often debilitating effects, it would seem, then, that pain has a significantly important role in the way that we live our lives daily, without which we would not function properly in the world. Take, for example, something as seemingly trivial as shifting one’s weight while standing. Those whose pain receptors are working optimally shift their weight often while standing or they change up their patterns when walking. Such shifting and changing are brought on by minor physical discomforts that the person experiences. Failure to make shifts while

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61 Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, The Gift of Pain: Why We Hurt and What We Can Do about It (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 4-5.

62 Ibid., 219.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.
standing or to change one’s pattern while walking can result in serious bodily complications, which is what happens to lepers when they do not consciously change their walking patterns or shift their weight when standing. There are, however, other reasons to think pain is only prima facie bad. As Eleonore Stump argues:

Furthermore, even pain is bad only prima facie, other things being equal; and other things are not always equal. To see this, consider that, for a variety of reasons, human beings voluntarily submit themselves to pain they could otherwise avoid—that is, pain that is not necessary for life or health. Perhaps the most obvious case in our culture has to do with athletics, where the best athletes put themselves through agonies in the interests of athletic excellence. We might suppose that in cases of this sort pain is only a necessary accompaniment to something that we would be glad enough to have without the pain if we could. But even if, contrary to appearances, this is true as regards athletics, not all cases in which people voluntarily accept pain they could forgo can be similarly explained away. Many women refuse anesthetics in childbirth, for example, although the baby would be born without the mother’s pain just as well as with it.65

Yet, when people willing submit themselves to certain pains, we often do not consider such as an evil, as Stump continues,

We are not inclined to raise the problem of evil in connection with the voluntarily accepted pains of childbirth, not only because the sufferer has in some sense chosen the pain, but also because it seems that, at least in the view of the women who have chosen to forgo anesthetics, the experience of so-called natural childbirth (that is, childbirth with its attendant pain) is, somehow, a great good.66

While the experience of childbirth can be extremely painful, it does not seem that such pains, when voluntarily chosen apart from anesthetics, are the kinds of pains that would raise the problem from evil, nor does it seem that it warrants some kind of justification or explanation.

It may be the case that both physical and mental pain might lead to suffering, but not all suffering is a result of pain. At the heart of suffering, Stump argues, is the notion of what a person most cares about. There is both an objective and subjective side to it; but not only that,

65 Eleonore Stump, Wandering in Darkness, 5-6.

66 Ibid., 6.
the nature of suffering itself is two-sided.\textsuperscript{67} Regarding the objective side, “Every human person,” says Stump, “has some care about what kind of person she is and about her flourishing as that kind of person. For that reason, part of what it is for her to suffer is for her to be kept, to one degree or another, from flourishing.”\textsuperscript{68} The subjective element, however, has to do with the desires of a person’s heart. On this Stump says, “Although a thing that is a heart’s desire for some person may (or may not) have considerable intrinsic value, the very great value it has for that person is a function of her commitment to it.”\textsuperscript{69} The value of a person’s heart’s desire is derivative from one’s care and love for it. Suffering results when we lose or when we are denied those things that are most desirable to our hearts. Essentially, what is bad about suffering, according to Stump, can be formulated in the following way: “What is bad about the evil a human being suffers is that it undermines (partly or entirely) her flourishing, or it deprives her (in part or in whole) of the desires of her heart, or both.”\textsuperscript{70}

Stump thinks that making a connection between what a person most cares about and suffering helps to explain, for example, why a person who voluntarily goes through certain instances of pain, such as in the case of a woman going through childbirth apart from anesthetic or an epidural (though she has it available to her), does not seem to be an instance that would raise questions pertaining to the problem from evil. As Stump explains, ordinarily pains associated with childbirth do not undermine a mother’s flourishing; moreover, if a mother so chooses voluntarily to give birth apart from medication or some other pain-reducing means,

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 11.
enduring such pain does not take away from her that which she cares most about. What makes suffering bad, then, “is that it undermines or destroys what the sufferer centrally cares about, her own flourishing or the desires of her heart or both.” However, it may not always be obvious to the sufferer that she is indeed suffering or that she even knows what her heart’s desire is. On the other side of it, she may not be aware that she is indeed flourishing or that she has obtained her heart’s desire. Stump has us imagine a person who thinks that she is perfectly healthy, only to come down with an illness and suddenly die. Yet, there may be a person who has had cancer. This person may have gone through treatment, while the whole time thinking that she still has the cancer, only to find out some time later that she is now cancer-free. The period between treatment and finding out she is cancer-free she thinks that she still has the cancer, when in fact she is healthy. Such does not mean that a person never knows when she is flourishing or when she has the desires of her heart; rather, all it implies is that a person’s views on her own flourishing or when she has the desires of her heart are not infallible. Stump’s conclusion regarding suffering is that it is more like ill health than it is like pain. On this last point she says, “Unlike pain, the state of our bodily health is not a matter that is invariably known to us by introspection or to those around us by ordinary observation. In the same way, neither introspection nor observation is invariably sufficient to recognize suffering. Suffering can have an opacity that pain typically does not.”

Suffering, then, as I will be using it in this project, is concerned with that which occurs in human creatures (and, perhaps, angels, too); it is that which depletes the soul, keeping a person

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71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 11-12.

73 Ibid., 12-13.
from flourishing or from having the desires of his heart. The suffering of a person may be
connected to pain, either physical or mental; however, that need not be the case. If suffering has
to do with a lack of flourishing or the obtaining of the desires of one’s heart, there are certain
types of suffering, then, that are in no way tied to pain.

**Summary of Chapters**

Having provided some working definitions in this chapter, it will now be helpful to give a
short survey of where this project is heading. Chapters Two through Six will examine and
evaluate four major metaphysical systems’ responses to evil in the world. I argue that of the four
metaphysical systems, theism provides the best explanation for understanding the phenomenon
of evil in the world and the best explanation for what God can do about evil. I will also take
space in Chapter Six to begin arguing for expanded theism, particularly why Christian theism,
which understands God as tri-personal, provides a more robust theistic response to evil in the
world than other theistic views.

In Chapter Seven I focus on the nature of the Trinity and the doctrine of perichoresis,
both of which play a key role in the theodicy proposed in the following chapter. Along with the
Trinity and perichoresis, several other important Christian doctrines—creation, *imago Dei*, fall,
gospel, church, theosis, and kingdom of God—are considered. Finally, I begin to argue, but work
out more extensively in Chapter Eight, that God had specific intentions in creating, which must
be taken into consideration when offering a theodicy. I will argue that from the beginning what
God wanted to bring about in creation is the kingdom of God—a kingdom which resembles
God’s own perichoretic life. If the kingdom of God was the *telos* of creation, then God did not
need evil in order to accomplish His goals in creating; rather all that it required was for humans
(and, perhaps, other creatures, too, such as angels) to have a certain function within the created
order, along with certain capacities (particularly human libertarian freedom), challenges, and so forth, in order for God to bring such a kingdom about through them. Yet, given the finite nature of anything that is not God, evil was bound to come about, particularly if such creatures were given libertarian freedom. The manifestation of evil was no surprise to God. Even before creating God made provisions, particularly through the plan of the atoning work of the Son and through the life-renewing work of the Holy Spirit. All of this lays the ground work for an attempt at proposing a theodicy in Chapter Eight, to which I now turn.

I begin Chapter Eight by comparing three prominent theodicies: (1) Free-will theodicy/defense; (2) Soul-making theodicy; and (3) ‘O Felix Culpa’ theodicy. While each of these theodicies have certain benefits and should be worked into a response to the problem from evil, none provide a full answer to the question of evil in the world. Having worked through each of the theodicies, I then offer, what I have dubbed, “the Trinitarian Perichoretic Theodicy” (TPT) as a possible candidate. After working out TPT, I argue that God is active in the world, working and fighting against evil. Central to God’s work in the world is through that of human agency. Humans, particularly those who are united with Christ in the Spirit, are enabled to do God’s work in defeating evil by means of the Son’s work in His incarnation, death, and resurrection, and through the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. I will then emphasize that it is because of God’s work that Christians have hope in conquering evil, not only in the world to come, where there will be no more sorrow or suffering and all things made new, but also in the here and now. In this way, TPT not only provides a response to the philosophical/theological problem from evil, but also to the religious/existential problem. Having worked out a proposed theodicy, the final chapter concludes the work, wrapping up all that has
been said and gives consideration to two objections surrounding the coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity.
CHAPTER 2: METAPHYSICAL SYSTEMS AND EVIL PART 1

NATURALISM

The problem of evil in the world is often couched as a religious or theological issue. Doubtless such is the case, but the problem of evil is also a metaphysical problem. According to Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman, the task of metaphysics, as a philosophical discipline, is to “get behind all appearances and describe things as they really are.”¹ What we want to know is whether evil is a real feature of our world. Why is it here (if this can be explained)? Why is it the way that it is? Why is there so much evil in the world? What best explains the phenomena of evil? But for theological systems, this becomes complicated in a different way. We want to know, given God, why evil? What is God doing about evil, if indeed God is doing or can do anything about evil? Yet, evil in the world is also a moral problem. Given a person’s worldview, how should one respond to evil? Is there a moral obligation to respond to evil? Since theists are not the only ones who raise questions about the phenomenon of evil in the world, it would seem reasonable to presume that all worldviews or metaphysical systems² must contend with evil in the world (if there is indeed evil in the world).

In the next five chapters I compare and contrast four possible worldview responses to evil: naturalism, pantheism, panentheism, and theism.³ For this chapter, specifically, I consider


² I recognize that there are various ways of classifying worldviews. Here, I am classifying worldviews based on their metaphysical commitments on God and God’s relationship to the world. Hence the terms “worldview” and “metaphysical systems” are used interchangeably.

³ Why these four and not others? Anytime that one takes on a project such as this, one must make choices between alternatives for economy’s sake. Surely various other worldviews could have been considered, such as polytheism, henotheism, finite godism, and deism, just to name a few. There are two general reasons why I chose these four over others. First, each of the four worldviews considered in this chapter provides a unique perspective
naturalism. But before going forward in comparing each metaphysical system’s response to evil, I lay out the ground rules for evaluating metaphysical systems. Once the ground rules are in place, I then consider each of the metaphysical systems separately. Compared to the other metaphysical systems, I argue theism provides not only the best explanation for the phenomenon of evil in the world, but it also provides an overall thicker worldview response. Lastly, I consider the limitations of generic theism and argue that in order to provide a robust answer to the problem of evil—both the intellectual and existential problems—one must move from restricted (generic, bare, etc.) theism to expanded theism, particularly Christian theism. There is good reason to make this move, especially as one considers the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. As I will argue in later chapters, generic theism is lacking in explaining how God can be essentially loving—a requirement for being essentially good—and yet a necessary eternal being.

Evaluating Metaphysical Systems

In Chapter One I put forth my argumentative strategy to answering the problem of evil as two-fold. Following C. Stephen Layman, I begin with the comparative response. From there I move on to present a theodicy. This chapter will focus on the former.

As I understand it, the comparative response need not argue that theism explains all evils well; rather, all that is required is that theism on the whole explains evil as well as (or better than) its metaphysical rivals. But what would showing that theism explains evil as well as (or better than) its metaphysical rivals accomplish? According to Layman,
Minimally, showing this would undermine the assumption that the problem of evil is a problem for theists only. For example, if naturalism explains evil no better than does theism, then if evil is a problem for theism, evil is a problem for naturalism too. Furthermore, if theism explains evil as well as naturalism does, then the phenomenon of evil does not provide a reason for accepting naturalism over theism. Finally, if theism explains evil better than naturalism does, then the phenomenon of evil might actually provide a reason to accept theism over naturalism.4

The comparative approach, as I will employ it here, is something akin to, or perhaps, a form of inference to the best explanation (IBE), a type of abductive reasoning often used in law courts, forensics, AI, history, and archeology.

Abductive reasoning differs from both deductive and inductive reasoning. Abduction does not guarantee that the conclusion follows logically and formally from the premises if they are true, like deductive arguments do; rather, it is more like induction in that the conclusion is warranted, though not guaranteed. However, unlike induction, which emphasizes a movement from the particulars of some set to a generalization (as understood by Aristotle) or statistical probability (as understood in a modern sense), abduction is concerned more with plausibility.5

IBE seeks to choose the best hypothesis from a pool of possible alternatives to describe some phenomenon in question. David Baggett and Ronnie Campbell describe the argument pattern in the following way:

We begin with a set of data points—states of affairs or established facts, the aforementioned phenomena in question—and construct a pool of possible explanation candidates. On the basis of a principled set of criteria we winnow the list down to the best explanation among the possibilities, and then hopefully achieve sufficient warrant to infer to it as the likely true explanation. The inference does not settle the matter, but produces new opportunities to subject the explanation to critical scrutiny to assess its effectiveness at providing further explanation of additional observations. Three important components of such an inference pattern, then, are (1) the set of salient facts requiring explanation, (2) the list of explanation

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5 For a good discussion on the differences between the three types of reasoning, particularly the views of Charles Saunders Peirce on comparing the three, see Douglas Walton, Abductive Reasoning (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2013), 2-17, 31-36.
candidates, and (3) the criteria by which we reduce the candidates down to the one that is the best.\(^6\)

In our case, then, the salient facts or state of affairs include, not only the types and kinds of evil in the world (moral and natural), but also the quantity and intensity of such evils, or, at least, how such evils appear to us, something of the phenomenology of encountering putative instances of evil. As noted, the candidates for explanation I consider include naturalism, pantheism, panentheism, and theism. No doubt others could have been chosen, but for economy’s sake, these four hypotheses have the most potential as live possibilities for explaining evil in the world. Each was chosen based on (1) how the metaphysical theory provides a unique perspective on God and the God-world relation and/or ultimate reality, and (2) the broadness of each metaphysical system, especially in how each can accommodate a variety of other perspectives that fall under those broader categories. Regarding this second criterion, if the broader metaphysical system fails in explaining the phenomenon of evil as well as or explains it less well than its metaphysical rivals, then so too do those perspectives that fall under it.\(^7\) Lastly, there are criteria by which to choose between alternative hypotheses. Let us consider such criteria, especially in relation to evaluating metaphysical systems as hypotheses or theories.

A metaphysical theory is a type of theory such that it sets out to provide an explanation or response to a metaphysical question. Metaphysical theories function much like how scientific

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\(^7\) For if all B’s make up a subset of A, and if A fails, then so too do all B’s. So, for example, if theism, as a metaphysical system, explains less well the phenomenon of evil in the world than its metaphysical rivals, then it fails, and so too do all individuated perspectives (e.g., Christianity or Islam) falling under theism as an overall metaphysical system. But all things considered, even if, say, theism fares less well than naturalism at explaining the phenomenon of evil in the world, it does not mean that theism fails as an overall system. One might have other reasons for thinking that theism is true. Furthermore, one should recognize, however, that there are certain combinations that rise above these four major worldview distinctions, such as something like Christian panentheism. We should, then, understand this principle only as a general principle of sorts and avoid reductionism in our thinking about worldviews.
theories work, seeking to unify our experiences and make them understandable.\textsuperscript{8} Philosopher William Hasker provides three important criteria for evaluating metaphysical theories: factual adequacy, logical consistency, and explanatory power.\textsuperscript{9}

Concerning factual adequacy, like any given scientific theory, metaphysical theories, too, are falsifiable, that is to say, such theories can be shown to be false. Moreover, just as scientific theories are built on the data that one knows to be true, so too are metaphysical theories. The problem, then, is this: when evaluating metaphysical theories, what are the facts that everyone agrees upon? For a first approximation, consider Hasker’s idea in this regard. Hasker suggests that the facts used to construct a metaphysical theory “must be consistent with what you know by other means to be true, and a theory which is inconsistent with what everybody knows (if there is anything which is known to everyone!) cannot be acceptable to anyone.”\textsuperscript{10}

Hasker’s second criterion, logical consistency, suggests that a theory cannot propose two logically inconsistent statements. While some inconsistencies are easy to spot, others are not always easy to identify. An example of logical inconsistency may be that God is both timeless and, yet, knows what is occurring \textit{now} in the world, or that a loving God \textit{seemingly} does nothing to stop evil from occurring in the world. To some, these may seem only \textit{prima facie} inconsistent.\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[]\textsuperscript{8} Though, it should be noted that the two are not quite identical, especially given the nature of metaphysical inquiry, as we shall see below. William Hasker, \textit{Metaphysics: Constructing a World View} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 25-26.
\item[]\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 26.
\item[]\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\item[]\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 27. For an extended discussion on the debate over different notions of logical consistency, coherence, and the divine attributes, see Ronald H. Nash, \textit{The Concept of God} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 12-14.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Explanatory power, the last of Hasker’s criteria, is important for any metaphysical theory in that it brings unity to the data. While all of the data may be correct and in proper order, such is meaningless without some kind of explanation. Thus when comparing metaphysical theories, it is not enough to have the data and logical consistency. Explanatory power is what helps the metaphysician to evaluate the various theories.\textsuperscript{12}

There are additional criteria not mentioned by Hasker, but that are, nonetheless, important. For instance, there is explanatory scope, which refers to how broad a theory reaches in explaining the data. Another criterion is the amount of \textit{ad hoc}-ness present. The less \textit{ad hoc}, that is to say, the less “artificial” or “contrived” some theory is, the better.\textsuperscript{13} A further criterion is plausibility. Plausibility is evaluated by two questions: (1) how plausible of an explanation is the theory in itself? and (2) how plausible of an explanation the hypothesis is relative to the other hypotheses?\textsuperscript{14} The last criterion is that of livability. What good is a theory if, after having shown that it explains the data well or that it is logically consistent, it proves not to be hypothesis that one can live consistently with from day-to-day.

What does the process of comparing metaphysical rivals look like? As we have already noted, comparing metaphysical theories is much like comparing scientific theories. British philosopher Basil Mitchell compared examining metaphysical systems or worldviews to the task of critical exegesis or history.\textsuperscript{15} The exegete, historian, scientist, or metaphysician does not stop with the first piece of information or evidence that confirms her theory; rather, she keeps looking

\textsuperscript{13} Baggett and Campbell, 113.
\textsuperscript{14} Walton, \textit{Abductive Reasoning}, 241.
for additional data. In this regard, metaphysical theories are falsifiable, since new information
can always be added that disconfirms a theory. Yet, the more confirmation that one has the more
probable or plausible the theory becomes.\(^\text{16}\) Thomas Morris provides the following illustration:

Suppose we are in a windowless room and we are considering two rival hypotheses: It is
raining outside and it is sunny outside. There are many events that would be expected to
occur if the rain hypothesis were true, such as: water beating on the roof, a friend coming in
soaked, water running in the street, etc. Suppose we hear the sound of water beating on the
roof (an observation of one of the above events). This observation confirms and raises the
probability of the rain hypothesis. Do we then \textit{know} that the rain hypothesis is true, that it is
raining outside?\(^\text{17}\)

The obvious answer is “no”, since there could always be other possible explanations for the
data.\(^\text{18}\) For all we know someone may be standing outside with a water hose spraying the roof.
Let’s suppose further that we were to observe other phenomena, such as a friend walking into the
house soaking wet or the sound of cars swishing by on what seems to be wet roads. Taken
separately, each event might have an independent explanation. The person with a water hose may
have sprayed our friend and the sound of water swishing on the road may have been caused by a
street sweeper having just washed the street. Independently, each event may provide
confirmation to the rain hypothesis, but not decisively. However, if each of the events were taken
together, says Morris,

their cumulative effect would be to raise the probability of the rain hypothesis so high that
we would be fully justified in believing that it is raining outside. The belief can be said to be
a justified subjective response to and result of the cumulative probability given to the rain
hypothesis by the three confirming observations.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{16}\) Ronald H. Nash, \textit{Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan,
1988), 63.


\(^\text{18}\) I am not here claiming that certainty is required for knowledge. One might just as easily arrive at
knowledge through non-deductive means of inquiry (e.g., induction and abduction).

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid.
And this, we believe, can lead to knowledge.

It should be noted, however, that such a formal procedure, says Morris, is not the kind of thing that takes place on a day-to-day basis. He continues:

[W]e do not go through such a formal procedure of consciously making and categorizing observations for which we consider rival explanations, just to decide whether it is raining outside. But we do naturally react to the individual and cumulative effects of sights and sounds (etc.) in determining what is and what is not going on around us in our environment (broadly speaking). This is how we live daily. There is a human capacity to naturally respond to evidences, confirmation, and probability without necessarily ever being consciously aware that this is what is going on. Such a response is basic to every act of responsible decision making, whether decisions of physical action or of belief.20

Morris’s point is well taken. Things such as experience and one’s overall character disposition, as well as a variety of background beliefs, all play a crucial role in the formation of a person’s worldview. The natural capacity to respond to evidence and the like, as Morris explains, often takes place without our ever being aware of it. That being said, even when formally discussing worldviews or metaphysical systems, not everyone will naturally begin on the same page. There will be disagreements over starting points or on what criteria should be included or excluded. As C. Stephen Layman says, “one unavoidably makes controversial assumptions about a series of issues, e.g., the nature of explanations, how best to formulate theism and its rivals, the nature of good and evil, and so on.”21 However, as Layman continues, “That the assumptions are controversial is not, I take it, a good reason to reject the Comparative Response.”22 Any well-argued philosophical position will come up against opposition, employing controversial premises not held by everyone. “This being so,” argues Layman, “both theism and its rivals will

20 Ibid.


22 Ibid.
unavoidably make use of controversial premises. Therefore, in the absence of a case to the effect that theism employs more controversial premises than its rivals do, the observation that theism employs controversial assumptions is without force.”23

**The Classification of Evil**

Having considered method, it will be helpful to take a further look at how evil will be understood in this chapter. In Chapter One I defended the classical Christian understanding of evil as privation of the good. In the sense that I argued for, evil as privation may not only include privation of the good of some “thing,” but also the privation of some good in God’s created order, particularly the moral order. When analyzing metaphysical systems, the above understanding of evil will not do, since it is too specific to theism, especially Christian theism. As Michael Peterson suggests, “the attempt to offer a specific definition at this point frequently ladens the meaning of evil with preconceived ideas and thus hinders objective discussion.”24 Following Peterson, then, this chapter will not presuppose the definition argued for in Chapter One; rather, it will consider evil in a much broader way, consisting of the kinds of things we generally call *evil*.25

What sorts of things might one include in such a “broad” and “commonsense” understanding of evil? Peterson suggests the following: “The set of commonly recognized evils includes, at the very least, such things as extreme pain and suffering, physical deformities, psychological abnormalities, the prosperity of bad people, the demise of good people, disrupted

23 Ibid.


25 Ibid.
social relations, unfulfilled potential, a host of character defects, and natural catastrophes.”

Such items on the list are commonly considered as evil, without having the negative effect of “prejudicing” the discussion. The list, suggests Peterson, indicates all of the things to which the term “evil” applies (extension), without specifying all that the term implies (intension).

Most philosophers giving consideration to the problem from evil recognize two kinds of evil in the world: moral evil and natural evil. As explained in Chapter One, moral evils are those evils that come about through moral agency. The phenomenon of moral evil can be broken down into subcategories, which include (1) human wrongdoing, (2) suffering caused by human wrongdoing, and (3) the total amount of suffering that comes about through human wrongdoing.

Natural evil, on the other hand, includes those kinds of evils or suffering that are not caused by a moral agent; rather, such evils are brought about by things such as animal attacks, hurricanes, tornados, floods, landslides, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, famines, and disease; however, it should be noted that such events are not themselves evils.

Furthermore, one must consider that the line between natural evil and moral evil is not always clear. Some evils are brought about by human negligence, such as pollution, the failure to evacuate during a natural disaster, or the spread of infectious diseases. As Layman notes, “Foolishness is a moral vice, any suffering or loss that results in such cases is at least in part a moral evil.” In those cases where humans are cruel to animals or inflict pain and suffering upon an animal without morally sufficient reason, such would be a moral evil. Yet, things like animal...
predation of a human would count as natural evil.\textsuperscript{30} Lastly, it must be noted that sometimes disease can cause humans to lose function of certain cognitive abilities, inhibiting them from making morally responsible choices.\textsuperscript{31}

Having given consideration to methodology and a general understanding of evil, I now turn to the naturalist’s response to evil. I offer a brief description of naturalism, following by a look at how naturalism explains the phenomena of evil in the world. In subsequent chapters, I then consider the other three metaphysical systems, followed by a comparison and contrast of each of the systems according to the criteria for evaluating metaphysical systems.

**Naturalism and Evil**

Among metaphysical alternatives in the West, perhaps naturalism is the greatest rival to theism. But what is naturalism? How should one understand the naturalistic conception of reality? To what extent does naturalism explain evil in the world? How does naturalism as an overarching Weltanschauung respond to evil in the world?

Nailing down a definition of naturalism is not an easy task; this is in part due to how one thinks of the word nature. As Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro suggest, one might take in the older, broader sense of everything having a nature as being “natural.” We may speak of humans, rabbits, rocks, angels, or God as all having a nature.\textsuperscript{32} But that is not, of course, how most people in the West take the words “nature” and “natural” today, unless one is steeped in philosophy or has studied theology. Much of recent Western thinking has been shaped by the

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

enterprise of scientific thinking, which has, in turn, shaped how we in the West have come to think of nature.

Science has become for many the primary tool by which we come to understand the world. Philosopher John Post outlines this train of thought well:

According to a number of influential philosophers, the sciences cumulatively tell us, in effect, that everything can be accounted for in purely natural terms. The ability of the sciences to explain matters within their scope is already very great, and it is increasing all the time. The worldview this entails, according to many, is naturalism: Everything is a collection of entities of the sort the sciences are about, and all truth is determined ultimately by the truths about these basic scientific entities.33

All naturalists, to some extent, place a high emphasis on scientific inquiry; however, some naturalists, more so than others, take science to be not just one of many ways of understanding the world, but the primary or only means by which we come to know things about our world. Such an epistemology has come to be known as scientism.

Philosophers have rightly distinguished between methodological naturalism and philosophical or metaphysical naturalism. Too often the two have been conflated, which is a mistake, since a conflation of the two leads to the false assumption that all naturalists are atheists. Methodological naturalism primarily concerns itself with a certain epistemology—a way of knowing the material world grounded in science; whereas metaphysical naturalism, while accepting the epistemological view of methodological naturalism, goes beyond to accept certain metaphysical commitments and implications about the nature of reality. A methodological naturalist may hold to belief in God; yet, she is deeply committed to scientific exploration and inquiry, while rejecting scientific design arguments such as those put forth by adherents of Intelligent Design (ID). Further, a methodological naturalist may or may not be committed to

materialism. Nevertheless, scientific explanation, by its very nature, naturalists say, leaves out any appeals to the supernatural or religious; all explanations appeal to the purely physical. While a worthy discussion in and of itself, our primary concern is not methodological naturalism but metaphysical naturalism (henceforth naturalism), to which we shall now turn.

Metaphysical naturalists accept the conclusions of methodological naturalism but go beyond by concluding that physical reality is all that there is—a view known as “physicalist materialism,” “physicalism,” or “materialism.” Regarding materialism, naturalistic philosopher John Searle has this to say:

There is a sense in which materialism is the religion of our time, at least among most of the professional experts in the fields of philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, and other disciplines that study the mind. Like more traditional religions, it is accepted without question and it provides the framework within which other questions can be posed, addressed, and answered.

The universe, or nature (read: all physical reality), according to the naturalistic point of view, is a closed system of cause and effect. There is no ultimate cause for the universe, such as a god, gods, ground of being, or underlying force; rather, the universe as we know it is self-sufficient and arrived to where it is now through a series of blind, purposeless natural processes. Mental states, suggests Searle, if they do have real existence, “must in some sense be reducible to, they

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34 It should be noted that while methodological naturalists place a high view on science in their epistemology, not all are committed to scientism, nor are all materialists or moral relativists. For further discussion see Kathryn Applegate, “A Defense of Methodological Naturalism,” Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith 65, no.1 (March 2013): 37-45. For a critique of methodological naturalism, see Stephen C. Dilley, “Philosophical Naturalism and Methodological Naturalism: Strange Bedfellows?” Philosophia Christi 12, no. 1 (2010): 118-141.

35 Dilley, “Philosophical Naturalism and Methodological Naturalism,” 119.

36 Post, Metaphysics, 11.

must be nothing but, physical states of some kind.” As Post suggests, such physicalist materialism reduces “all the properties of things to the properties of the basic physical entities.”

Following Layman, then, I take naturalism to mean the view that there is a material reality that is essentially physical, that exists either necessarily, eternally, or by chance, that is self-organizing—that is to say, it is not organized by a deity or force of sorts—and that every ultimate explanation is inanimate. But to what extent can naturalism account for evil? How plausible is evil given naturalism?

Naturalism and Life

If naturalism is to succeed at explaining evil, then it seems that naturalism must, at least, be capable to explain life. The naturalistic understanding of life begins with the Big Bang, by which the entirety of the universe, including all space, time, and matter, exploded into existence some 13.5 billion years ago. Resulting from the Big Bang, galaxies, stars, and planets all formed. On one small planet—earth—life emerged from non-life out of a pre-biotic soup through evolutionary processes. As philosopher J. P. Moreland describes it,

the process of evolution, understood in either neo-Darwinian or punctuated equilibrium terms, gave rise to all the life forms we see including human beings. Thus, all organisms and their parts exist and are what they are because they contributed to (or at least did not hinder) the struggle for reproductive advantage, more specifically, because they contributed to the tasks of feeding, fighting, fleeing, and reproducing.

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38 Ibid.
39 Post, Metaphysics, 11.
41 I am following closely certain aspects of Layman’s format and method when considering all four views, though Layman only contrasts naturalism and theism.
Given naturalism’s grand story, how surprising is life? As Stephen Layman argues, there can be no life unless the universe has been “fine-tuned” for life to exist. Layman is referring to the “anthropic principle,” which states that the universe has certain fundamental features that if they were slightly different, there could be no life in the universe as we know it. But how likely should we expect the anthropic principle to be, given naturalism? It does not seem likely. If the universe came into existence at a finite point in time, as the Big Bang model of cosmology suggests, then one might always ask why the laws of nature turned out as they did. Why these laws? Why this universe? Perhaps, one might reply by saying that there was something in place prior to the Big Bang? But as John Barrow and Frank Tipler suggest with respect to the Big Bang singularity, “At this singularity, space and time came into existence; literally nothing existed before the singularity, so, if the universe originated at such a singularity, we would truly have a creation ex nihilo.” In other words, there was no mechanism in place prior to the Big Bang that

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44 Astrophysicists often make a distinction between the Weak Anthropic Principle (WAP) and the Strong Anthropic Principle (SAP). John Barrow and Frank J. Tipler define the two as follow:

“Weak Anthropic Principle (WAP): the observed values of all physical and cosmological quantities are not equally probable but they take on the values restricted by the requirement that there exists sites where carbon-based life can evolve and by the requirement that the Universe be old enough for it to have already done so.”

And

“Strong Anthropic Principle (SAP): the Universe must have those properties which allow life to develop within it at some stage in its history.”

Of the two, SAP is the more controversial. Virtually no one denies that something like WAP is true, though there are various definitions of it. For our concerns, we have something more like WAP in mind. See John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, The Anthropic Cosmological Principle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 16, 21. See also Patrick Glynn, God the Evidence: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World (Rocklin, CA: Forum, 1997), 26-31; Robin Collins, “A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God,” in Reason for the Hope Within, ed. Michael J. Murray (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 47-75, especially p. 49.

45 Paul Davies asks a similar question, “Whatever initial conditions gave rise to our universe, one can always ask: Why those? Given the infinite variety of ways in which the universe could have started out, why did it start out in the way it did? Is there something special, perhaps, about those particular initial conditions? It is tempting to suppose that the initial conditions were not arbitrary, but conformed to some deep principle. After all, it is usually accepted that the laws of physics are not arbitrary, but can be encapsulated in neat mathematical relationships. Might not there exist a neat mathematical ‘law of initial conditions’ too?” Paul Davies, The Mind of God (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 89-90.

46 Barrow and Tipler, The Anthropic Cosmological Principle, 442.
would assure the laws to turn out just as they did in our universe. As a self-organizing reality, the universe surely could have existed in a variety of forms.\textsuperscript{47} Without something in place, it seems highly improbable that the universe just churned out such principles and regularities that are necessary for the existence of life in our universe. Robin Collins gives the following example of just such a principle:

The force of gravity is determined by Newton’s law $F = G m_1 m_2 / r^2$. Here $G$ is what is known as the gravitational constant, and is basically a number that determines the force of gravity in any given circumstance. For instance, the gravitational attraction between the moon and the earth is given by first multiplying the mass of the moon ($m_1$) times the mass of the earth ($m_2$), and then dividing by the distance between them squared ($r^2$). Finally, one multiplies this result by the number $G$ to obtain the total force. Clearly the force is directly proportional to $G$: for example, if $G$ were double, the force between the moon and the earth would double.\textsuperscript{48}

Collins goes on to explain:

[S]ome calculations indicate that the force of gravity must be fine-tuned to one part in $10^{40}$ in order for life to occur. What does such fine-tuning mean? To understand it, imagine a radio dial, going from 0 to $2G_0$ where $G_0$ represents the current value of the gravitational constant. Moreover, imagine the dial being broken up into $10^{40}$—that is, ten thousand, billion, billion, billion, billion—evenly spaced tick marks. To claim that the strength of gravity must be fine-tuned to one part in $10^{40}$ is simply to claim that, in order for life to exist, the constant of gravity cannot vary by even one tick mark along the dial from its current value of $G_0$.\textsuperscript{49}

The example given here by Collins is just one of many recognized constants.\textsuperscript{50}

Not all naturalists agree that the Big Bang is the final stop. In order to explain the anthropic principle, some naturalists have turned toward multiple universe theories. Such

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{47}] Layman, “Moral Evil,” 14.
\item[\textsuperscript{48}] Collins, “A Scientific Argument,” 67.
\item[\textsuperscript{49}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{50}] Hugh Ross, The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Greatest Scientific Discoveries of The Century Reveal God (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1995), 118-121.
\end{itemize}

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theories stress a multitude of distinct physical universes that exist (or could have existed), and, for all we know, there could be (have been) an infinite number of such universes. One such model is the oscillating big bang model, by which the universe, at random, expands and contracts, perhaps ad infinitum. If such a process of exploding and collapsing has been going on for all eternity, then eventually we should expect the coming about of such a fine-tuned universe as our own. While such a theory may increase the probability of one or more universes eventually producing life, it nevertheless complicates the naturalistic hypothesis by adding a further feature, going merely from a self-organizing reality to a mechanism that generates a large (perhaps an infinite) number of universes at random.

The oscillating model is, by no means, the only model available. There are a variety of other multiverse scenarios. Despite the model taken, as physicist Paul Davies suggests, the multiverse hypothesis merely shifts the problem elsewhere. Such a theory requires “many assumptions.” He explains:

First, there has to be a universe-generating mechanism, such as eternal inflation. This mechanism is supposed to involve a natural, lawlike process—in the case of eternal inflation, a quantum ‘nucleation’ of pocket universes, to be precise. But that raises the obvious question of the source of the quantum laws (not to mention the laws of gravitation, including the causal structures of spacetime on which those laws depend) that permit inflation. In the standard multiverse theory, the universe-generating laws are just accepted as given: they don’t come out of the multiverse theory. Second, one has to assume that although different pocket universes have different laws, perhaps distributed randomly, nevertheless laws of some sort exist in every universe. Moreover, these laws are very specific in form: they are described by mathematical equations (as opposed to, say, ethical or aesthetic principles). Indeed, the entire subject is based on the assumption that the multiverse can be captured by (a rather restricted subset of) mathematics.

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52 Though, even here there are questions as to whether or not one is playing fast-and-loose with probability, given that such other universes are incapable of being compared and studied empirically. See Paul Davies, The Cosmic Jackpot: Why our Universe is Just Right for Life (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 170.


54 Davies, The Cosmic Jackpot, 204.
Even if one were to couple the multiverse scenario with something like string/M theory, explains Davies, such mathematical specifications must be accepted as a given. But even here there could be other different unified theories, such as N theory, that one could propose. Davies questions such theories. Often theorists choose theories based on their elegance. He goes on to argue, “But this is to import a new factor into the argument—questions of aesthetics and taste. We are then on shaky ground indeed. It may be that M theory looks beautiful to its creators, but ugly to N theorists, who think that their theory is the most elegant. But then the O theorists disagree with both groups. . .”

Naturalism and Consciousness

Despite the difficulty of the presence of life given naturalism, there are still yet other problems with the naturalistic paradigm as it relates to the question of evil. Such difficulties include the notion of consciousness, the metaphysics of good and evil, and human responsibility. We begin with the problem of consciousness.

If naturalism is to explain either moral or natural evil, then it must also be capable of explaining the presence of sentient creatures that are capable of suffering. Yet, in order to do this, it must also explain the presence of creatures with consciousness. How successful is naturalism in this respect?

Granting something like evolutionary theory, naturalists have reason to expect life. But what of life with consciousness? Surely there are all kinds of creatures without consciousness,

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55 Ibid., 205.

such as plants and certain lower-level life forms. And given the way in which evolution works, things could have gone quite differently from how it did. We could have been stuck in a world with single-cell organisms, or a world that consisted primarily of plants and lower-level life forms. How is it that life transitioned from life apart from consciousness to life with consciousness, according to the Darwinian schema?

Philosopher Thomas Nagel, who is himself not a theist, finds “physico-chemical reductionism” in the field of biology “hard to believe.” In his book, Mind and Cosmos, Nagel sets out to build a case against materialism based on the difficulties of consciousness coming about from within a purely materialist understanding of reality. For physicalists, consciousness reduces to chemical reactions within the brain. Though a bit outdated, philosopher Bertrand Russell paints a portrait of the physicalist conception of the connection between the human body and mind:

Of this physical world, uninteresting in itself, man is a part. His body, like other matter, is composed of electrons and protons, which, so far as we know, obey the same laws as those not forming part of animals or plants. There are some who maintain that physiology can never be reduced to physics, but their arguments are not very convincing and it seems prudent to suppose that they are mistaken. What we call our “thoughts” seem to depend upon the organization of tracks in the brain in the same sort of way in which journeys depend upon roads and railways. The energy used in thinking seems to have a chemical origin, for instance a deficiency of iodine will turn a clever man into an idiot. Mental phenomena seem to be bound up with material structure. If this be so, we cannot suppose that a solitary electron or proton can “think”; we might as well expect a solitary individual to play a football match. We also cannot suppose that an individual’s thinking survives bodily death, since that destroys the organization of the brain and dissipates the energy which utilized the brain tracks.  


It is exactly this type of understanding of physico-chemical reductionism that Nagel questions.

For Nagel, any attempt at equating the physical with the mental ultimately fails. One such strategy is conceptual behaviorism, which attempts to identify mental phenomena with “behavior” or “behavioral dispositions” or “forms of behavioral organization.”\(^{59}\) Other attempts, claims Nagel, are primarily verificationist in nature, in that, all that could be said about the content of a mental statement is that which could be confirmed, warranted, or verified about it by some observer. “In one way or another,” says Nagel, “they reduce mental attributes to the externally observable conditions on the basis of which we attribute mental states to others.”\(^{60}\)

While there is no doubt that there is a vital connection between “mental phenomena” and “behavioral manifestations,” such theories are inadequate and insufficient in analyzing the mental, since they leave out something essential that lies beyond the externally observable grounds for attributing mental states to others, namely, the aspect of mental phenomena that is evident from the first-person, inner point of view of the conscious subject: for example, the way sugar tastes to you or the way red looks or anger feels, each of which seems to be something more than behavioral responses and discriminatory capacities that these experiences.\(^{61}\)

In other words, the physical processes cannot adequately explain the subjectivity of our experiences.


\(^{60}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{61}\) Ibid. Nagel is not alone in critiquing naturalism’s capability for explaining the relationship between physical events and mental events. Philosopher David Bentley Hart argues quite convincingly that naturalists have difficulty explaining the phenomenology of consciousness in six key areas: “*The qualitative dimension of experience,*” “*abstract concepts,*” “*reason,*” “*the transcendental conditions of experience,*” “*intentionality,*” and “*the unity of consciousness.*” For a fuller critique of naturalism’s attempt at explaining the phenomenology of consciousness, see *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, and Bliss* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 152-237, and especially see 172-203.
Yet, Nagel finds untenable even those nonanalytic attempts that suggest mental phenomena are truly something inside of us, such as J. J. C. Smart’s psycho-physical identity theory. Psycho-physical identity theories equate some mental event, such as a pain or taste sensation (Φ), with a corresponding physical event (Ψ). In other words, mental events are identical (theoretically, not analytically) to their corresponding physical events: Ψ = Φ much like Water = H₂O. However, this raises a serious question for the materialist: “What is it about Φ that makes it also Ψ?”  

In order for the identity to be a scientific truth, rather than a conceptual one, the property that Ψ has must be such that it is conceptually distinct from those “physical properties that define Φ.”  

In an effort to avoid dualism, says Nagel, materialists must retreat back into some form of analytical behaviorism, whereby “[w]hat makes the brain process a mental process . . . is not an additional intrinsic property but a relational one—a relation to physical behavior.”  

There are, nevertheless, problems with this kind of theory. Again, Nagel argues, something seems to be missing. Just as with the behavioral theories before them, such explanations do little by way of explaining subjective appearances. Furthermore, Nagel suggests that these kinds of solutions proposed by identity theorists suffer from Saul Kripke’s critique that whereas “Water=H₂O” is a necessary truth, the relation between Ψ/Φ is contingent in nature. When one has H₂O one needs nothing more to have water. The physical components H₂O are sufficient for having water. It remains what it is apart from any kind of perceptual experience. But is this the case for the relation between Ψ and Φ?  

62 Ibid., 39.  
63 Ibid.  
64 Ibid.  
65 Ibid., 40-41.
So if \( \Psi \) really is \( \Phi \) in this sense, and nothing else, then \( \Phi \) by itself, once its physical properties are understood, should be sufficient for the taste of sugar, the feeling of pain, or whatever it is supposed to be identical with. But it doesn’t seem to be. It seems conceivable, for any \( \Phi \), that there should be \( \Phi \) without any experience at all. Experiences of taste seems to be something extra, contingently related to the brain state—something produced rather than constituted by the brain state. So it cannot be identical to the brain state in the way that water is identical to \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \).\(^{66}\)

Based on a purely naturalistic understanding of the world, the physical sciences seem to be quite incapable of explaining the connection between mind and body, and thus seem incapable of providing a clear explanation as to how mental events arise out of purely physical processes. Mental events, while no doubt connected to physical experiences, nevertheless seem to be something quite different in nature.\(^{67}\) Naturalism as a Weltanschauung does not give us reason to expect conscious life arising from purely physical processes.

Naturalism, Good, Evil, and Responsibility

But what of the metaphysics of good and evil? Furthermore, how should we understand human responsibility from a naturalistic perspective? If naturalism is to explain evil, particularly moral evil and certain forms of natural evil, then it must, at least, provide some basis for judging whether some action is evil or not. For a naturalist, what structure is in place to judge some action as being right or wrong, just and unjust?\(^{68}\)

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 41.

\(^{67}\) For a similar argument, see Alvin Plantinga’s “Is Naturalism Irrational?,” in *The Analytic Theist: an Alvin Plantinga Reader*, edited by James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 72-96. Plantinga argues that evolution and naturalism conflict. At best, naturalism leads to agnosticism and doubt about whether our cognitive faculties lead us to truth about the world, given that the main goal of evolution is to produce adaptive beliefs. Such beliefs need not be true or false about the world; all that they need to do is help us to adapt, survive, or be fit. However, the whole scientific and naturalistic program rests on the ability to understand and know the world in a rational way. Plantinga has sharpened and nuanced this argument in his most recent book on the subject, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially pp. 307-350.

\(^{68}\) Susan Neiman addresses how in recent times discussions on the problem of evil have focused more on the moral dimension of evil than the natural one. See *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
A naturalist has available to her at least four options. First, she could opt for some kind of anti-realism, such as emotivism, according to which there is no such thing as moral facts but only human emotional responses. Anti-realism, coupled with naturalism, would lead one to doubt whether naturalism could explain moral evil at all. It would not explain it so much as explain it away. Not wanting to go the way of the anti-realist, the naturalist could, secondly, adopt something along the lines of Platonism, the idea that moral truths exist independently of physical reality, or thirdly moral supervenience (moral naturalism), the understanding that moral truths in some sense supervene on conscious intelligent moral creatures. Of these three options, anti-realism may or may not find support from naturalism, but as noted, it does not do much by way of explaining evil, as we are considering evil in this chapter. Platonism and supervenience, on the other hand, in and of themselves, do not seem to be a given from naturalism. We would not expect either given naturalism. Platonism appeals to non-natural properties and objects, and supervenience sounds a bit like a promissory note, and assertion more than an explanation. In addition, both options would be an addition to the naturalistic hypothesis. 69 There is a fourth option for the naturalist, however. Perhaps evolution itself is the key to understanding values? 70

According to Richard Dawkins, the sense of “right and wrong” can be traced back to our “Darwinian past.” 70 If we are to understand the origins of morality, then it must be the by-product of natural selection. While natural selection explains aspects of our species’ survival, such as, “hunger” or “sexual lust,” why do human beings have the “powerful urge” to contribute

69 Layman, “Natural Evil,” 25. David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls’ forthcoming God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning, take on both Platonism and ethical naturalism in various formulations, arguing that, with respect to moral facts, moral knowledge, moral transformation, and the convergence of happiness and holiness, classical theism and Christian theology provide the better explanation

to relief efforts or to take care of widows and orphans? Dawkins believes that these powerful urges are founded in our genes. He goes on to explain:

The logic of Darwinism concludes that the unit in the hierarchy of life which survives and passes through the filter of natural selection will tend to be selfish. The units that survive in the world will be the ones that succeeded in surviving at the expense of their rivals at their own level in the hierarchy. . . . The whole idea of the selfish gene, with the stress properly applied to the last word, is that the unit of natural selection (i.e. the unit of self-interest) is not the selfish organism, nor the selfish group or selfish species or selfish ecosystem, but the selfish gene. It is the gene that, in the form of information, either survives for many generations or does not. Unlike the gene (and arguably the meme), the organism, the group and the species are not the right kind of entity to serve as a unit in this sense, because they do not make exact copies of themselves, and do not compete in a pool of such self-replicating entities. That is precisely what genes do, and that is the – essentially logical – justification for singling the gene out as the unit of ‘selfishness’ in the special Darwinian sense of selfish.\footnote{Ibid., 245-246. For a similar view see Victor J. Stenger \textit{God: The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows that God Does Not Exist} (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), p. 209.}

The way genes insure survival is to program the organism toward selfishness. There are times, says Dawkins, when our genes make sure of their survival by “influencing” the organism “to behave altruistically.”\footnote{Ibid.} Two ways that genes program an organism toward altruism are: 1) “kinship” and 2) “reciprocal altruism.”\footnote{Ibid.} When an organism takes care of its offspring or “genetic kin,” it becomes more likely that the genes will survive through several generations. The concept of reciprocal altruism is akin to our notion of “I’ll scratch your back if you’ll scratch mine.” Reciprocal altruism may even occur between species. Nevertheless, this practice is prevalent among human beings and may explain why there are consequences for those who do not fulfill their end of the deal.

Resting on the Darwinian notions of kinship and reciprocation are some “secondary structures.” For example, “reputation,” explains Dawkins, is important to human society. One
individual might have a reputation for kindness while another individual might be known for his conniving. Reputation is a way that an individual might foster reciprocation among one’s species, thus preserving one’s genes. One other example, argues Dawkins, is “conspicuous generosity.” By this, Dawkins means that an individual among a species may participate in “risk-taking” or “ostentatious generosity” in order to “buy mates” or to “buy success.”  

Dawkins believes that these four reasons are “good Darwinian reasons” why individuals behave altruistically. Hence our moral behaviors, like other behaviors necessary for survival, are “by-products” from our evolutionary past.

Having dismissed morality grounded in the character of God or divine revelation, Dawkins argues for something like a “consensus” for morality.

How, then, do we decide what is right and what is wrong? No matter how we answer that question, there is a consensus about what we do as a matter of fact consider right and wrong: a consensus that prevails surprisingly widely. The consensus has no obvious connection with religion. It extends, however, to most religious people whether or not they think their morals come from scripture. With notable exceptions . . . most people pay lip service to the same broad liberal consensus of ethical principles. The majority of us don’t cause needless suffering; we believe in free speech and protect it even if we disagree with what is being said; we pay our taxes; we don’t cheat, don’t kill, don’t commit incest, don’t do things to others that we would not wish done to us.

He goes on to propose that humans should adopt something akin to a “New Ten Commandments.” “Don’t cause harm” or “Do not do to others what you would want them to do to you” just to name a few of the proposed commandments. He believes that a list, such as the

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74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Such attempts at explaining why we behave altruistically, however, in no way accounts for moral obligation. They do nothing by way of giving us reasons as to why we should behave in such-and-such a manner.

77 Ibid., 298.

78 Ibid., 298-299. Interestingly, Dawkins found his proposed (and I should add, only potential) list of “New Ten Commandments” while doing an internet search. He did not, himself, construct the list, but borrowed it from
one he duplicates, could be produced by any “decent” individual living today; however, such a list, while not set in stone, exemplifies the spirit of the age (Zeitgeist) in which we live. For instance, the modern world has moved beyond slavery or racial and gender inequality, such offensive and oppressive treatment that is condoned by the Bible. This “shift” of moral conscience is, Dawkins believes, in a positive direction. It is an improvement from times before. What was acceptable, even generations ago, is no longer acceptable by today’s standards. Such things as derogatory language or racial slurs, while still going on today, are looked down upon by the majority of the world. Even regarding the way in which war is approached today, says Dawkins, the aim is to have as few casualties as possible. But what is the cause of this shift? Ultimately, it is not clear what the cause might be, claims Dawkins, but

[f]or my purposes it is enough that, as a matter of observed fact, it does move, and it is not driven by religion – and certainly not by scripture. It is probably not a single force like someone’s website. Most of the commandments on the list he could agree with, while nuancing some or adding a few of his own. The point, then, argues Dawkins, is not that this particular list should be the complete list, but rather the list exemplifies some of the major moral agreements that exist among people. It would seem that, in order to have a true “consensus”, one would have to observe all cultures—something that, from what I can tell, Dawkins has not done. Furthermore, given Dawkins’ proclivity toward science, his observations are by no means empirical in and of themselves. One would think that with such a bent toward science, one would provide the appropriate data to support one’s conclusions. None is given. Perhaps Dawkins is blind to the significant impact the Judeo-Christian worldview has had upon Western thinking? Even outspoken atheist Jürgen Habermas recognizes the immense debt recent discussions on human rights owes to the Judeo-Christian worldview: “Christianity has functioned for the normative self-understanding of modernity as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and a social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of current challenges of a postnational constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk.” See Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, ed. and trans. Ciaran Cronin and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), pp. 150-51.

79 Dawkins, in reading of the Christian Bible, or any other sacred text for that matter, does so without any hermeneutical sophistication, nor does he provide any interaction with key interpreters of Scripture from the three major Christian traditions. But beyond that, again it seems that Dawkins is oblivious to the key role that the Christian Scriptures and worldview have played in social reform, particularly in the fight over such issues as slavery and inequality.

80 One might ask: “Positive in what sense?” Dawkins is not at all clear on this?

81 Ibid., 300-304.
gravity, but a complex interplay of disparate forces . . . Whatever its cause, the manifest phenomenon of Zeitgeist progression is more than enough to undermine the claim that we need God in order to be good, or to decide what is good.\textsuperscript{82}

Dawkins has presented what he thinks is a clear model, which serves as a substitute for any kind of morality based on the character of God or divine revelation. But Dawkins’ model is far from clear.

Can natural selection provide for us a proper basis for moral choice? It would seem not. In his two-fold theory, Dawkins posits two separate theses:

(1) our genes determine our urges, and

(2) humans have freedom to reject such urges.

Regarding (2), Dawkins has this to say:

We have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth and, if necessary, the selfish memes of our indoctrination. We can even discuss ways of deliberately cultivating and nurturing pure, disinterested altruism – something that has no place in nature, something that has never existed before in the whole history of the world. We are built as gene machines and cultured as meme machines, but we have the power to turn against our creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators.\textsuperscript{83}

But (1) and (2) are contradictory. Given the naturalistic worldview coupled with evolutionary theory humans are to be understood in strictly physicalist terms. If we are to understand human morality from a naturalistic evolutionary standpoint, is there room left for any kind of libertarian or contra-causal “free choice” in how humans are to behave. In the words of David Berlinski: “If evolutionary psychology is true, some form of genetic determinism must be true as well. Genetic determinism is simply the thesis that the human mind is the expression of its human genes. No

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 308.

slippage is rationally possible.” Similiarly, Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro make the point that

while Dawkins enthusiastically promotes a naturalistic, reductive explanation of the development of morality and values, he believes that we now have morality and values to justify resisting our biological urges and natural impulses. The natural world has, in a sense, produced beings that are in a position to critique the natural world.

On the one hand, Dawkins has gone out of his way to show how altruistic moral choices are the by-product of Darwinian evolution, yet, on the other, he wants to affirm that humans have the ability to accept or reject those altruistic moral choices of our genes.

Furthermore, Dawkins has failed to answer two critical questions: how human beings are to decide right and wrong (i.e., how to come up with this proposed consensus) and why human beings “ought” to act morally. Concerning the first question, Dawkins promotes an agnostic approach as to how humans are to decide between right and wrong. All that is important for Dawkins is that a basic consensus exists. By making this move, Dawkins is able to sidestep the issue and move from his Darwinian explanation for the origin of morality to his notion of consensus and the moral Zeitgeist. Why should there be a consensus at all? Why should we think that such a consensus corresponds with moral truth? How is it that Dawkins effect the shift from moral epistemology to moral ontology? Furthermore, why is there a progression in moral conscience? Are these progressions of moral behavior the telos of natural selection? It would seem not. According to natural selection, it is not guaranteed that we were supposed to turn out the way that we have, or that the species, Homo sapiens, would have ever existed in the first place.

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85 Goetz and Taliaferro, *Naturalism*, 89.

86 Dawkins, 298.
place. As J. Budziszewski makes clear, “Darwinism is not a predictive theory.” Budziszewski goes on to say that “[a]n evolutionary ethicist of this . . . sort does not claim that Darwinism itself provides the foundation for ethics. What it does tell us, he thinks, is the general features of human nature that ethics must come to terms with.” Budziszewski’s point is significant. All that evolutionary biology can give us about ethical standards is a description of how humans behave as a result of their genetic predispositions. Furthermore, as Goetz and Taliaferro point out, ultimately, Darwinianism cannot condemn evil:

If naturalistic determinism is true, then all the evil that has occurred was determined to occur by naturalistic causes. Deterministic naturalists may be deeply committed to fighting injustice – indeed, there is no doubt that many self-described naturalistic determinists are profoundly committed to promoting justice and other virtues . . . . But while theists maintain that evil is an aberration, an unnecessary violation of the natural goodness of the cosmos and its purpose, deterministic naturalists see evil as an essential part of nature, a necessary feature of reality and not at all in violation of the purposes of the cosmos.

How does Dawkins answer the second question of why we ought to act morally? He does not. On the one hand, Dawkins readily admits that absolute moral standards need not exist for us to act morally, yet, on the other hand, he has provided no reason why we ought to act morally at all. All he has provided is a description of “positive” behavior. As Arthur Holmes asks, “how can empirical facts (or anything else that ‘is,’ for that matter) impose duties or obligations on us?” As the Humean dictum goes, one cannot derive an “ought” from an “is”. Darwinian

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88 Ibid., 251.

89 Goetz and Taliaferro, 93.

90 Dawkins, 265.

determinism ultimately reduces the “ought” to causes rather than to give commands for how we should live.\textsuperscript{92} It would seem, then, that Naturalism as a metaphysical system is incapable of explaining both the metaphysics of good and evil and human responsibility.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 76.
CHAPTER 3: METAPHYSICAL SYSTEMS AND EVIL PART 2

PANTHEISM

Having considered naturalism and evil, I now turn to pantheism as an overall worldview response to evil. It will be important to consider, first, how the pantheistic picture of the world differs from the naturalistic understanding, and second, to what extent pantheism can explain the presence of evil. As with naturalism, four areas will be considered: life, consciousness, the metaphysics of good and evil, and human responsibility. Lastly, and quite differently from naturalism, as a theological system, how does the God of pantheism respond to evil in the world? What is God doing? What can the God of pantheism do?¹

As with any metaphysical system, it is important, at the risk of reductionism, to recognize that there is more than one variety of pantheism,² and that pantheism can fit with a variety of ontologies.³ But this should not keep us from arriving at a basic understanding of pantheistic teaching.

Erick Steinhart suggests that pantheism affirms, minimally, that “(1) all existing things are unified; and (2) the maximally-inclusive unity is divine.”⁴ Similarly, philosopher Michael P. Levine defines pantheism as the view that

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¹ Though throughout this chapter I engage various pantheistic thinkers, my primary interlocutor is Michael Levine, who has done more in recent years to put forth a systematic work on pantheism. His Pantheism: A Non-theistic Concept of Deity is the definitive work on the pantheistic worldview from a modern philosopher of religion.


³ For example, Erick Steinhart suggests that there are at least three live possibilities for ontologies among pantheists: (1) materialism; (2) Platonism; and (3) class-theoretical Pythagoreanism. See “Pantheism and Current Ontology,” Religious Studies 40 (2004): 63.

⁴ Ibid.
there exists an “all-inclusive unity” that is “divine.” John W. Grula defines pantheism as “the doctrine that God is not a personality or transcendent supernatural being but that all laws, forces, manifestations, and so forth of the self-existing natural universe constitute an all-inclusive divine Unity.”

According to Paul Harrison, pantheists hold that the Universe and Nature alone should receive the “deepest reverence.” For the pantheist “all things are linked in a profound unity.”

There is a deep interconnection and interdependence among all things, among which, humans are an inseparable part. While pantheists do not always agree on the extent of unity and divinity involved, both factors are, nevertheless, central.

Pantheistic thought can be found in a diverse group of forms, such as scientific pantheism, New Age thought, deep ecology movements, Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, ancient stoicism, and natured-oriented paganism. Some pantheists refuse to use “God” language, so as to not confuse their understanding of the divine with theistic conceptions, while others find no problem saying things like “the Universe is God.” Certain Hindu forms of pantheism are multileveled in that they are also polytheistic. The gods are all part of the all-encompassing “Absolute.” Take, for example, this passage from *The Bhagavad Gita*, whereby


8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 3.

11 Ibid.
the Hindu god, Krishna, who is the incarnation of Brahman, allows the ancient warrior Arjuna to capture a glimpse of “the supreme mystery of the Self.”

12 Arjuna responds,

15. O Lord, I see within your body all the gods and every kind of living creatures. I see Brahma, the Creator, seated on a lotus; I see the ancient sages and the celestial serpents.

16 I see infinite mouths and arms, stomach and eyes, and you are embodied in every form. I see you everywhere, without beginning, middle, or end. You are Lord of all creation, and the cosmos is your body.

17 You wear a crown and carry a mace and discus; your radiance is blinding and immeasurable. I see you, who are so difficult to behold, shining like a fiery sun blazing in every direction.

18 You are supreme, changeless Reality, the one thing to be known. You are the refuge of all creation, the immortal spirit, the eternal guardian of eternal dharma.

19 You are without beginning, middle, or end; you touch everything with your infinite power. The sun and moon are your eyes, and your mouth is fire; your radiance warms the cosmos.

20 O Lord, your presence fills the heavens and the earth and reaches in every direction. I see the three worlds trembling before this vision of your wonderful and terrible form.

One can gain a clear depiction from this passage of how all things, ultimately, despite their many manifestations, belong to one “supreme, changeless Reality.”

Pantheists give the “Universe” or “Nature” the same primacy that theistic religions give to their conception of God. It is the “Universe” or the “All” or the “One” or the “Ultimate” or the “Unity,” rather than a theistic deity, that awakens within people a sense of awe, wonder, love, and acceptance, and hence the Universe should be revered. It is this reverence toward the Universe, which is also divine (in some sense), that separates pantheists from naturalists. Yet, there are at least two ways in which pantheists distinguish their views of the divine from those of

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12 *The Bhagavad Gita*, 11.1


14 Harrison, *Elements of Pantheism*, 3.
theism. First, unlike the god of theism, a being that is ontologically transcendent and separate from the universe, God in pantheistic thought is radically immanent (at least ontologically).\textsuperscript{15} Second, God for pantheists is non-personal.\textsuperscript{16} God does not act or will or want or desire. Such thinking about God is anthropomorphic and is avoided, at least by most pantheists.

One of the more notable Western pantheists is Benedict de Spinoza. Like many other forms of pantheism (e.g., as the passage above from the Bhagavad Gita represents), though not all,\textsuperscript{17} Spinoza’s brand of pantheism is monistic—the view that there is only one Being and that all other parts of reality are in some way identical with this Being, or, at least, modes of it are.\textsuperscript{18} The following passage clearly represents Spinoza’s notion of monism:

I do not know why matter should be unworthy of the divine nature, since . . . outside God no substance can exist from which the divine nature could suffer. All things, I say, are in God, and everything which takes place takes place by the laws alone of the infinite nature of God, and follows . . . from the necessity of His essence. Therefore, in no way whatever can it be asserted that God suffers from anything, or that substance extended, even if it be supposed divisible, is unworthy of the divine nature, provided only it be allowed that it is eternal and infinite.\textsuperscript{19}

For Spinoza, substances are independent existing entities. He agreed with theists that God is an infinite substance and that no contingency exists in God. But if it is the case that God is an infinite substance, he argued, then there could be no such thing as independent substances; rather, all individual things are extensions or “modes” of the attributes of God. If God is

\textsuperscript{15} Levine argues that transcendence is not completely absent from pantheistic thought, especially as one considers concepts of transcendence and immanence found in certain metaphysical principles of Taoist and Confucianist thought. See Pantheism, 111-113.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 95.

\textsuperscript{17} Levine argues that while many pantheists are monists, it is not the case that all pantheists are. Rather, like most other people, they are pluralists. See Pantheism, 71-92.


infinite—an infinity that includes the world—and if there is no contingency in God, then there would also be no contingency in the world. Spinoza’s brand of pantheism is highly deterministic, as are most forms of pantheism.\(^{20}\)

Robert Corrington, in discussing his particular version of pantheism, makes a distinction between \textit{natura naturans} (nature naturing) and \textit{natura naturata} (nature natured). Such a distinction is fundamental to his own “Deep pantheism.” Both \textit{natura naturans} and \textit{natura naturata} are “dimensions of and in nature, not separate orders one in and one out of nature.”\(^{21}\) Of the two, \textit{natura naturans} is the more difficult to explain. Corrington describes it as “nature creating itself out of itself alone.”\(^{22}\) There is no “extra-natural creator”; rather “[n]ature is eternal and continually self-renewing,” says Corrington. Nature naturing refers to “the dimension of nature churning with potencies, potencies that spawn innumerable orders of the world.”\(^{23}\) \textit{Natura naturata}, on the other hand, is better defined with respect to “the orders of the world,” similar to what Christians call “creation.”\(^{24}\) Rather than there being some kind of “order of orders,” there are, instead, “innumerable orders” within nature nurtured, some of which are “powerful sacred orders” or “sacred folds” or “numinous orders” “central to human religious

\(^{20}\) David Ray Griffin, \textit{God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 96. Theists would, of course, reject Spinoza’s view of God’s infinity and his understanding of substances. Moreover, some theists holding to a form of essentialism would no doubt hold that God does have some contingent properties. Such properties are not, however, essential to God’s being. See Ronald H. Nash, \textit{The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 16-17; Jay Wesley Richards, \textit{The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity and Immutability} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 82-105.


\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.
experience.” Corrington goes on to explain: “nature contains deep unconscious depths from which sacred powers emerge” and such “sacred folds, semiotically dense, have neither internal consciousness nor intentionality.” Corrington, however, hesitates to say that all of nature is itself sacred. He reserves the term “sacred” for those “numinous orders” within nature. Yet, human encounter with such sacred folds brings about a religious experience such that it “shakes the self to the core of its being and conveys something of the power of nature.” Corrington summarizes his view of Deep Pantheism as follows:

Deep Pantheism is a form of pantheism in that it affirms that nature is all that there is and that there is no divine agency located somehow outside of nature. It is ‘deep’ in the sense that it recognizes a churning unconscious depth of nature from whence all orders, sacred or otherwise, come. The gods and goddesses we encounter in sacred folds are all ejects from the primal potencies of nature naturing. They combine power and meaning, as Tillich would say, but in ambiguous ways that do not have a teleological cumulative force. So I would say that the sacred is in and of nature and that nature per se is neither sacred nor non-sacred.

Corrington’s view of pantheism diverges from the Hindu and Spinozistic variants on one central point. Unlike the Hindu and Spinozistic versions, there is no one overarching divine to which all things ultimately belong; rather, there are various divine touching points or, as Corrington calls them, “sacred folds” throughout nature. There is not one thing which orders all of the other orders; rather, in some sense, the various orders work together to “combine power and meaning” without some ultimate direction or telos in view. So, for Corrington, the divine or sacred is found within nature, but it is not all-encompassing. Such encounters with various sacred

25 Ibid., 505-506.
26 Ibid., 506.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
folds ("gods and goddesses") bring about awe and wonder. In this sense, Deep Pantheism is considerably religious.

So, given the diversity of pantheistic thought, how ought one to define pantheism? There seems to be at least seven major strands that make up pantheistic thought:

1. All things are interconnected and deeply unified
2. This all-inclusive unity is divine (in some sense)
3. The all-inclusive divine unity is the self-creating and self-organizing cause of all things
4. The all-inclusive divine unity is either eternal or necessary or both
5. The divine is non-personal
6. The divine neither transcends the world nor is it ontologically distinct from the world
7. The divine unity is the object of one’s ultimate concern, worship, and pleasure

I take pantheism to mean the view that there is a reality such that all things are unified and that this all-inclusive unity is divine (in some sense); that the non-theistic concept of the divine is neither personal nor ontologically distinct from the world (as compared with theistic conceptions of God); and that the all-inclusive divine unity is the self-creating and self-organizing cause of all things, eternal and/or necessary, and the object of one’s ultimate concern.

**Pantheism and Life**

How does pantheism as an overall metaphysical system explain the phenomenon of evil? To account for evil, pantheism, like naturalism, must be able to explain life, but in order to explain life it must be able to explain the existence of the universe as it is. Pantheists of all stripes recognize that something like the “Universe,” “Nature,” “God,” “All,” “One,” or “all-inclusive divine Unity” (henceforth AIDU) is either eternal or necessary. As noted already, pantheists reject anything like a transcendent god of theism, who exists apart from the space-time universe, creating the heavens and the earth. Paul Harrison, in critiquing the Thomistic Cosmological Argument (TCA), finds no reason, given our having “no problem imagining an infinite future,” as to why there cannot also be a chain of causes that extend infinitely into the
Furthermore, Harrison thinks that the TCA is logically flawed, namely, because it takes as its key premise that everything requires a cause for its existence. Yet, the theistic God himself exists apart from any cause. If something can exist apart from a cause, then why could not that thing be the Universe itself? Harrison goes on to argue,

> When we say that something has a cause, we mean that something preceded it which brought it about – cause precedes effect. But by definition the Universe includes all time and space, and no time could have preceded it. It seems unreasonable to ask for the cause of a totality that includes all space and all time. The only answer theists provide to this argument is to modify the premise to say “Everything except the first cause requires a cause.” But to skeptics this merely seems like an evasion, not an answer.

Given there is no external creator, one is left pondering where it all came from. Harrison suggests two options: (1) the universe is self-created; or (2) the universe has existed eternally.

According to Michael Levine, the creation of the universe is something of a mystery. Most pantheists reject anything like a creation ex nihilo, as theists hold. But, Levine says creation ex nihilo does not necessarily conflict with the central tenets of pantheism. Nevertheless, pantheists have other options. One might simply take creation as “brute fact”, as most atheists and naturalists do; however, Levine opts for something more like emanationism—if one were to take some doctrine on creation from a pantheistic perspective, that is. Emanationism is the view that “creation” is a flowing forth from God, rather than God, in some sense, making, forming, or fashioning the world. Such a view recognizes that God is “in” the world and the world is “in” God. Regarding emanationism as a form of creation, Levine says the following:

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30 Ibid.

31 Ibid. Harrison’s argument is deeply flawed. It does not seem that he clearly understands major aspects of Thomas’ CA, particularly the notions “potentiality,” “actuality,” “essential cause.” Harrison especially falls short of understanding Thomas’ idea of God as actus purus (pure act); but for now, his discussion will serve as a jumping off point for understanding the pantheist perspective on the universe and life.

Emanationism appears to provide a doctrine which—if not an explicit ground on which to base pantheism—is at least one that is seen as congenial. As a doctrine of creation, it may even provide a partial basis for pantheism—as it has (arguably) for Plotinus, Eriugena, and even for Spinoza where “God” is the immanent cause of all things. The view that God is the “immanent cause” of things is a kind of creation doctrine for Spinoza and a basis for Unity. So far as Lao Tzu has a doctrine of creation it too is emanationist. “The Tao engenders one, One engenders two, Two engenders three. And three engenders the myriad things” (Tao Te Ching, XLII). The Tao is “the primordial natural force, possessing an infinite supply of power and creativity. Not only does the Tao create things—it is responsible for, or makes possible, their growth. “It nourishes them and develops them . . . provides for them and shelters them” (Tao Te Ching, LI).

Emanationism tends to affirm rather than deny a common ontological, substantial and evaluative base among everything that exists (e.g. whatever it is which creatively emanates, it is “Good”). It is therefore seen as in keeping with the central tenets of pantheism, and where pantheists adhere to a doctrine of creation it tends to be emanationist. Since Unity must partly be explained evaluatively, the fact that emanationism is often linked to the “Good” provides further reason for supposing it consonant with pantheism.  

Perhaps, then, if pantheists were to have a doctrine of creation, something like emanationism might hold to be the best option.

In addition to being eternal and self-existent, the all-inclusive divine unity is self-organizing. Most pantheistic systems are compatible with something like neo-Darwinian evolution, especially those pantheistic systems which place a high view on science and nature.

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33 Levine, Pantheism, 195-196.

34 Others, however, are doubtful that emanation is a viable option for the pantheists. Douglas Hedley argues that Levine makes a serious mistake in conflating “subtle theism” with pantheism simply because each is concerned about unity. A subtle theist, such as Plotinus or Hegel—both of whom Levine claims as pantheists—is one who holds to “a transcendent creative unity who may or may not be deemed personal.” Plotinus and other Neo-Platonists held to the “One” as radically transcendent, which stands in contradistinction to the pantheistic view of the divine and reality. Emanation has to do primarily with the production of lower things from the higher. See “Pantheism, Trinitarian Theism and the Idea of Unity: Reflections on the Christian Concept of God,” Religious Studies 32, no. 1 (Mar 1996): 62-65, 70. Accessed December 23, 2012. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20019794. Cf. Keith Ward, God: A Guide for the Perplexed (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 158-162, who suggests that those who are often labeled as “pantheists” are panentheists instead. Anytime that God transcends nature, then one is faced with a panentheistic conception of God. It seems to me that something like this would be the case with respect to emanationistic accounts of creation.

Even those that do not emphasize evolution, they nevertheless understand life existing as a series of cycles of birth and rebirth. All life is intricately connected and interdependent.

Let us begin by considering the claim that AIDU is necessary. For something to be necessary, it must be the case that it exists in such a way in all possible worlds. There is no possible world in which it exists differently—in its essential nature—from the way it does. Theists generally claim that God is a necessary being, that is to say, that which makes God what God is (God’s essential nature) must be the case in all possible worlds. It could not be otherwise. But can a pantheist claim that the divine is necessary? The idea of necessity raises a significant problem for pantheists. Many pantheists hold that the world is either in some sense identical to the divine or, at least, an expression of the divine, that is, creation flows forth out from the divine. Yet, in any case, this would prove to be incompatible with the idea that the divine is necessary and self-existent, particularly if we think that there is any kind of contingency in the world. For the “All” or the “Ultimate” or “God” to share being with the world would result in its being limited by the world.36 Further, as H. P. Owen put it, “Alternatively, if the world is (as it manifestly is and must be) contingent, and if it is part of God, he cannot be necessary.”37 To say that some being is both necessary and contingent results in a contradiction, which Owens likens to saying that some “figure is both a circle and a square.”38 Especially if one were to take Spinoza’s brand of pantheism, one in which there is no contingency in the universe, then one would have a highly deterministic universe. For some forms of pantheism, creation flows by necessity from God. This stands in stark contrast to theistic views that recognize that God creates

36 Owen, Concepts of Deity, 70.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
ex nihilo out of His free decision. But as David Clark and Norman Geisler suggest: “Now there is nothing inherently incoherent with viewing creation as necessary. . . . If God creates necessarily, then God must create. If creation is necessary, then God cannot not create.”

Whether the universe is an extension of God, as in Spinoza, or the universe flows from God, as with Levine, such a universe would have significant implications for human responsibility and evil in the world (which we will consider below).

But let us consider the claim that AIDU is eternal. What does it mean to say that something is eternal? At minimum, to say that something is eternal means that it has no beginning or ending. In theism, this is known as the everlasting view of eternity, in which God exists without a beginning or end. This everlasting eternal view of the world seems to be the view that most Hindus and Buddhists hold and the view that Harrison and Corrington favor. Though, like most pantheistic views on nature and the universe, it is difficult to pin down just exactly what it is that one believes. Harrison finds as a live possibility something like the multiverse hypothesis or Stephen Hawking’s suggestion that space-time curves back on itself much like that of a sphere. For Hindus, the cosmos has expanded and retracted many times (which sounds much like certain forms of the multiverse hypothesis). Buddhists, too, hold that there is no ultimate beginning to the world. Whichever is the case, there would be no true

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39 David K. Clark and Norman L. Geisler, Apologetics in the New Age (Eugen, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1990), 149.

40 See Nicholas Wolterstorf, “God Everlasting,” in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion, eds. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 78. The majority of Christians have held to God’s temporal mode of existence as timeless, that is, God exists apart from any kind of temporal or spatial extension. I will consider the idea of divine eternity a bit further in chapter 4.


42 Harrison, Elements of Pantheism, 38.

43 Smart, Worldviews, 52.
beginning or end. As considered in our discussion on naturalism, there are some significant problems with the idea of the multi-verse, particularly in view of the anthropic principle. I will not rehearse those here. Rather, I will consider some difficulties with the notion of an infinite past.

As noted earlier, Harrison sees no problem with the idea of an infinite past. After all, we can imagine a limitless future (though, this too, has some issues of its own, as we will see), so why cannot the same be true of the past? When assessing the TCA, Harrison suggests that there must be another cause—something that caused God. If God is the final stop, then why could the universe itself not also be the final stop? He argues:

The argument for a creator God also has a very serious logical flaw. It is based on the premise that everything requires a cause—and yet theists accept that one thing does exist without a cause: God himself. This tends to undermine the basic premise of the argument. God is thought to exist without a cause. But if one thing can be self-existing, why can this one thing not be the Universe itself?44

Part of the problem with Harrison’s argument, like many others who misunderstand TCA, is that Thomas is not primarily concerned with arguing for a temporal cause—he actually held to the possibility of infinitely long temporal regress of causes and effects within the space-time universe—rather, the ultimate cause exists as a prior cause logically, which would not need a cause for its existence—such a cause would be necessary. Here we might follow Stephen Davis and make a distinction between “linear causation” and “hierarchical causation,” where linear causation has to do with causation in a temporal or linear fashion and hierarchical causation is concerned with causes that are logically related to some object.45 Let us suppose that some object $x$ is the temporal or linear cause of some object $y$. We can imagine $y$ remaining in existence even

44 Harrison, *Elements of Pantheism*, 37.

if $x$ were to cease to exist. For example, a shoe depends on its being formed by a shoemaker. The shoemaker could cease to exist while the shoe remains. In this case, the shoe is dependent only temporally or linearly on its formation from the shoemaker; however, the shoe can remain in existence despite what happens with respect to the shoemaker. But how might we understand the notion of hierarchical causation and logical dependency? Perhaps Greek mythology can lend us an example. In Greek mythology there is a character known as Atlas who eternally holds the world on his shoulders. If Atlas were to cease to exist, then the world would no longer be sustained. In this case, the world is dependent on Atlas for its continually being sustained in existence. The dependency is not in any way temporal or linear (or, at least, not merely so); rather, it is a logical kind of dependency. For Aquinas, God not only created the world, but God sustains the world in existence. If God were to cease to exist (which is impossible), then so, too, would the world. If God were to remove his sustaining power, then the world would cease to exist. It is this kind of dependency—logical dependency—that Aquinas had in mind with respect to causation in his second “Way.”

But how is it that we can have something like a linear regress but not a hierarchical one? Unfortunately, Aquinas does not tell us. Stephen Davis suggests two possibilities. Aquinas, says Davis, was opposed to the idea of an actual infinite. In the world, there cannot be an infinite number of members of any one thing. For example, it would be impossible to have an infinite number of, say, dogs, cats, people, or atoms in existence all at once or at the same time.\textsuperscript{46} Davis goes on to say, “Now if there were an infinite number of linear causal ancestors of some presently existing thing—some human being, say—those ancestors would not all have to be

\textsuperscript{46} The idea of an actual infinite existing in the world would lead to all kinds of absurdities, which I will consider below.
existing right now. . . . Most of them would presumably be dead and gone. No actual infinite would be required to exist all at once."47 Rather, what we have in the world is a potential infinite—the idea that the world is ever increasing toward an infinite without ever reaching it. But why couldn’t this be the case with respect to hierarchical causation, in which the effect depends on the continued existence of its cause? Here Davis responds: “the effect cannot exist unless all its hierarchical causes simultaneously exist.”48 In other words, “if there were an existing human being who had an infinite number of hierarchical causes, that would require the existence all at once, here and now, of every one of them—an actual infinite,”49 which for Aquinas, would be impossible.

The objector might obviously retort back by asking: “Why couldn’t there be something like an infinite temporal regress in the world?” or, at least, “Why couldn’t the past extend backwards infinitely?” In response to such questions, theistic philosophers, pace Aquinas, have argued that it is impossible for infinite temporal regress to exist in the world, since such would in reality be an actual infinite. In their formation of the Kalam cosmological argument, William Lane Craig and James D. Sinclair have put the argument against the actuality of an infinite temporal regress in the following way:

2.11 An actual infinite cannot exist.
2.12 An infinite temporal regress of events is an actual infinite.
2.13 Therefore, an infinite temporal regress of events cannot exist.50

47 Davis, God, Reason and Theistic Proofs, 62.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
But why think that an actual infinite could not exist in the world? Craig and Sinclair provide a variety of thought experiments illustrating the kinds of absurdities that result from the instantiation of an actual infinite in the world. The primary example is that of Hilbert’s Hotel, which goes as follows. Suppose we have a hotel with a finite number of rooms, and none of those rooms has a vacancy. If a guest were to show up, the doorman would have to kindly turn the guest away, since all of the rooms are currently occupied. Now let’s suppose that, rather than the hotel having a finite number of rooms, it contains an infinite number of rooms, with each of the rooms currently occupied by a guest. But in this scenario, if a guest was to show up, the doorman could easily accommodate him. “Sure,” says the doorman, “we can make room.” The doorman proceeds to move each guest over one room. The guest in room #1 he moves to room #2, the guest in room #2 to room #3, and so on ad infinitum. Having moved all of the guests over one space, room #1 now becomes vacant. The doorman checks the guest in and all rooms are now once again occupied. Things get stranger, suggest Craig and Sinclair. Suppose an infinite number of guests show up at the desk. Just as what happened with the one guest, the doorman now shifts each person over. But rather than moving all of the guests only one room over, he places each person in a room twice his own, such that the person in room #1 goes into room 2#, the person in room #2 goes into room #4, the person in room #3 goes into room #6, so on ad infinitum until all of the even rooms are now occupied, leaving vacancies in all of the odd numbered rooms for the guests, and thus all of the guests would be accommodated. These are just two examples of the kinds of bazaar occurrences that would take place if an actual infinite existed in reality.

Per 2.12, then, an infinite temporal regress of events would constitute an actual infinite. Such would also mean that a beginningless set of past events or moments would constitute an actual infinite. But do Craig and Sinclair’s thought experiments automatically rule out the notion of an infinite set of past events? Stephen Davis suggests that these kinds of thought experiments argue only against the notion that an infinite series of a set can exist at any given time. In order to demonstrate this, Davis gives the example of a library. Rather than an infinitely large library containing an infinite set of books all at once, suppose that the library was a smaller one with an emphasis on the longevity of it rather than its size. Suppose further that this particular library only contains one book in its collection at a time, and each year the librarian destroys the book and then replaces it with a new one. While a book’s life is only a year in the library’s collection, the library itself has existed an infinite number of years.\(^5^2\) Davis goes on to argue:

Here then truly would be a library with an infinitely large collection of books, but it would seem that Craig’s paradoxes no longer apply. Taking away one book at any given time would reduce the collection in size (to zero); adding ten books would increase the size of the collection (to eleven), etc. If I am right, the critic . . . can argue that there is no incoherence in the idea of an infinite number of past events. As long as past time is infinite, the infinite number of past events can occur in serial order, one at a time (or any finite number at a time); at no one time do an infinite number of events occur.\(^5^3\)

If this kind of objection is correct, then, perhaps, the pantheist has good grounds for thinking the universe is infinitely old.

It is important to note that the kind of argument Davis puts forth assumes an A-Theory of time and something like presentism—the ontological view that the only temporal objects, items, or things that exist are those that exist in the present.\(^5^4\) According to presentism, the past no


\(^5^3\) Ibid.

\(^5^4\) Craig and Sinclair, “The Kalam Cosmological Argument,” 115. Philosophers of time make distinction between an A-theory and B-theory of time. A theorists hold that time is dynamic and that there is a real progress to it—a real moving from the past to the present to the future. Most A theorists are presentists in some sense and hold
longer exists and the future has not yet occurred? Whether presentism is true or not is not something that I can consider here, but for our purposes we will assume that something like presentism is true.

If something like presentism were true, would it allow for an infinite set of past events, as Davis’s presumed critic might argue? It does not seem so. Craig and Sinclair provide an independent argument based on the notion of successive addition. The argument goes as follows:

2.21 A collection formed by successive addition cannot be an actual infinite.
2.22 The temporal series of events is a collection formed by successive addition.
2.23 Therefore, the temporal series of events cannot be an actual infinite.55

This argument does not so much argue against the possibility of an actual infinite, as did the previous one, but only against the notion that an actual infinite can be formed through successive addition. By “successive addition,” Craig and Sinclair mean “the accrual of one new element at a (later) time.”56 The crucial element in the process is the temporality of it. What they are concerned with is the “temporal process of successive addition of one element after another.”57

No one would doubt the impossibility of an actual infinite by successive addition in the case that there is a beginning point that is moving toward infinity. Suppose we have a finite number \( n \). If one were to make an addition to it, say, \( n + 1 \), then what we are left with is a finite number. But

\[ \text{that the past no longer exists while the future has not yet occurred. B theorists reject that time is dynamic. Rather than thinking of time as moving in a direction, we should think of all events somehow existing simultaneously within the entire four dimensional space-time universe. We speak of time in earlier than and later than relations. For a fuller discussion on the A and B theories of time, see J. M. McTaggart, “Time: an Excerpt from The Nature of Existence,” in Metaphysics: The Big Questions, eds. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden: Blackwell, 2004): 67-74; Garrett J. DeWeese, God and the Nature of Time (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 4, 15-16; William Lane Craig, Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 115-216; Alan Padgett, God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 82-121.} \]

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
the problem is more complicated than that. Craig and Sinclair put the problem in the following way:

The question then arises whether, as a result of time’s asymmetry, an actually infinite collection, although incapable of being formed by successive addition by beginning at a point and adding members, nevertheless could be formed by successive addition by never beginning but ending at a point, that is to say, ending at a point after having added one member after another from eternity. In this case, one is not engaged in the impossible task of trying to convert a potential into an actual infinite by successive addition. Rather at every point the series already is actually infinite, although allegedly successively formed.\(^{58}\)

But this, too, is problematic. Here is why. If one cannot expect to count to an infinite, how can one expect to count down from an infinite? Moreover, if one cannot traverse the infinite by moving in one direction, then how can one expect to traverse an infinite going the other. Craig and Sinclair continue:

In order for us to have “arrived” at today, temporal existence has, so to speak, traversed an infinite number of prior events. But before the present event could occur, the event immediately prior to it would have to occur; and before that event could occur, the event immediately prior to it would have to occur; and so on ad infinitum. One gets driven back and back into the infinite past, making it impossible for any event to occur. Thus, if the series of past events were beginningless, the present event could not have occurred, which is absurd.\(^{59}\)

They further support this claim by providing a thought experiment. Suppose we have a person named Tristram Shandy, who has set out to write his autobiography. It takes Shandy a full year to write about one day’s worth of events. Shandy opines that at such a rate he will never finish his autobiography. Sadly, since Shandy is mortal, surely he would die before finishing a year’s worth of his life. But let us suppose that Shandy somehow comes by way of immortality. Would not this change the game and allow him to complete his task? The great atheist philosopher, Bertrand Russell, seemed to think so. Given an average of one day per year, all that one would

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 118.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.
need in order to write about an infinite number of days is an infinite number of years. Such would be plenty of time for Shandy to accomplish his autobiography, provided that he is diligent in his task. But Russell’s solution will not do. Despite Shandy’s best efforts, the opposite would seem to be true. Rather than finishing the book, provided he lived forever and had an infinite amount of time to complete it, Shandy would only get further and further behind. Each day that he writes would only lead to another year of laborious work. But that is not the only difficulty. If Russell’s argument was correct, why is it, then, that Shandy did not finish his autobiography sooner, say, yesterday, the day before, or last month? After all, could not he have finished it at any time in the past? But such would be absurd, since he has been writing an infinitely long time. Thus one can conclude that a temporal series of events cannot become an actual infinite through successive addition.

Given such arguments as the ones presented here by Craig and Sinclair, it would seem that the pantheist does not stand on good ground for thinking that the universe is eternal; rather, it would seem more likely that the universe began to exist at a finite time in the past, which would align with standard Big Bang cosmology. If that is the case, then the universe cannot, itself, be necessary; rather, it must be contingent and dependent on something else for its existence. But that would raise a significant problem for the pantheist, since in some sense or another, the universe is identical with God. But as H. P. Owens argued, “if God to any extent transcends the world—if there is any element of his being that is not contained in the world—pantheism, in the strict sense, is false.” This would seem to hold for those pantheists who argue that the universe is in some sense a self-expression of or emanation out of God. Owen further

60 Ibid., 120; Davis, God, Reason and Theistic Proofs, 153-154.

61 Owen, Concepts of Deity, 70.
argues, “Merely to speak of the world as a self-expression of the One is to imply that the One has a separate nature to express.”

Despite those immense difficulties that come with expressing how AIDU can be either eternal or necessary, it does seem that, depending on the kind in consideration, pantheism has one up on explaining the complexity of life in the universe. Unlike the turn in recent forms of naturalism, which posits something like an eternal universe generator that perpetually or eternally produces universes, the pantheist can chalk it up to the divine. Though not personal, the pantheistic concept of deity functions as an eternal organizer of sorts. The various laws or forces at work in nature are all encompassed in the divine Unity.

Assuming something like neo-Darwinian evolution, pantheists have a mechanism for how life emerges on earth. Harrison believes that evolution is a “successful scientific explanation of how design emerges in the most complex things” and that it is “a wonderful mechanism for perfecting design, and like any great designer, it has both creativity and rigorous discipline.”

Evolution is creative in the sense that it brings about new variations through random mutations and sexual reproduction. The environment weeds out poor design, allowing those organisms that are best adapted to thrive and those that are not to die off. Harrison further describes evolution in pantheistic terms in the following way:

For pantheists, evolution is a universal force that works even on non-living things. From the very instant of our universe, every individual thing has existed in the midst of other things, and has had to adapt to the community of beings in which it finds itself. Evolution is at work even in the realms of mind and society. Ideas, scientific theories, technologies and products are tested against each other and the most effective survive.

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62 Ibid.
64 Though, given the impersonal nature of the divine in pantheism, one may question Harrison’s enthusiastic use of terms like “design,” “designer,” “create,” and “rigorous discipline.”
65 Ibid.
When Harrison speaks of evolution as a “force,” he does not go into great detail about what he means by that. Is such a force eternal? Is it necessary? Has it always been a part of the nature of the universe? Is evolution one of many of the forces that are part of AIDU or is it the driving force behind everything? All this needs fleshing out. But what is clear for Harrison, and for most pantheists, is that the force cannot be personal in nature. It should be noted, however, that some pantheists such as Plotinus and Spinoza do see something like a Mind at work in creation. It is, as Norman Geisler describes it, an “immanent providence” at work.\(^6^6\) In his assessment, Geisler recognizes that the providence takes place from within creation rather than over or beyond it, as it does in theism, and it is the immanent nature of God that leads him to suggest that it is pantheistic. If one accepts emanationist accounts of God,\(^6^7\) then the pantheistic view can accommodate for a kind of Intelligence at work in the world, which is an improvement over a purely atheistic or naturalistic understanding that all things came about through mindless or purposeless chance.\(^6^8\)

**Pantheism and Consciousness**

Despite the limitations of explaining either the eternality or the necessity of AIDU, and assuming something like neo-Darwinian evolution, pantheism fares much better at explaining life than does naturalism, but how well does it fare at explaining consciousness? As noted, an

\(^{66}\) Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: God, Creation*, Vol. 2 (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), 567. Not everyone is in agreement that Plotinus and other emanationists can be called pantheists. Moreover, if one were to suggest that the Divine is in some sense intelligent, then would that not stand in contrast to the pantheistic view that God is impersonal?

\(^{67}\) I am inclined to think that such thinking is confusing pantheism with panentheism.

\(^{68}\) Ibid.
explanation of consciousness is required for providing an adequate explanation of evil in the world, particularly any kind of suffering. Again, it would seem that pantheism fares better than naturalism when it comes to the notion of consciousness. Pantheism has available to it a wide variety of resources regarding consciousness. There are some pantheists who are also physicalists. Interestingly enough, this tends to be a Westernized pantheism influenced by naturalism. Such pantheists will run up against the same kinds of issues we saw that naturalists face regarding the nature of consciousness. Thus I will not consider physicalist pantheism here.

Non-physicalist pantheists, however, may ascribe to something like panpsychism, animism, idealism, or a general dualism in order to explain consciousness in the world. While not a pantheist himself, philosopher Thomas Nagel has recently gravitated toward panpsychism—the view that all things in the physical world are also mental—as a means to explain not only consciousness, but also cognition and values, which, he argues, is something that psycho-physical reductionist theories cannot do. Animism is the view that a living soul is behind the organization and animation of the world, including plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena. Idealist pantheists are monists, recognizing that the material world is maya (illusion) and does not really exist. Mind or spirit is ultimate. Lastly, some pantheists are also

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69 Harrison, Elements of Pantheism, 84. On this point, it does not seem how pantheism as a system differs much from naturalism. Harrison admits that while for physicalist pantheists the universe has no mind, it does feature various minds in humans and in other sentient life. Moreover, the Universe has no ultimate purpose or meaning. Of course, Harrison suggests, this does not mean that the universe is utterly absurd. Perhaps the decisive factor which separates physicalist pantheists from naturalists is that of worship. But why then call oneself a pantheist at all? Why not hold to something like religious naturalism? For an example of a recent work advocating religious naturalism, see Loyal Rue, Nature is Enough: Religious Naturalism and the Meaning of Life (Albany, New York: Suny Press, 2011). Cf. Sam Harris, Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

70 Nagel, Mind and Cosmos, 56-57. While I do not deal with it in this chapter, it seems that panpsychism has some major difficulties, particularly the combination problem. I discuss these difficulties more fully when I consider the process pantheistic view of panexperientialism in the next chapter.

71 An idealist understanding would raise many questions of its own. Would all suffering be an illusion? Or would all suffering primarily be a matter of mental pain? Furthermore, would such a view align with the salient facts of pain and suffering that we see taking place in the world, especially how we think of physical pain? For a modern
dualists.\textsuperscript{72} It is a misconception that all pantheists are monists. For pantheistic dualists, the key is not in understanding whether just one kind of substance exists or not; rather, emphasis is placed on the Unity. Though pantheism does not entail any one of these options, all seem to fit well within a pantheistic scheme, and each provide a possible explanation for consciousness in the world.\textsuperscript{73}

**Pantheism, Good, Evil, and Responsibility**

But what of moral responsibility and the metaphysics of good and evil? Before discussing human responsibility, it may be helpful to consider whether pantheism has any basis for values. A central tenet of theism is that God is perfectly good. When theists speak of God as “good,” they mean that God is good both ontologically and morally speaking.\textsuperscript{74} Within the very nature of God, there is no evil or badness, nor any sort of metaphysical deficiency. Furthermore, not only is God himself good, from the theistic perspective, but God cannot perform any action that is rightly deemed irremediably immoral or unjust or wrong or bad. By this is not meant that God’s goodness is to be understood Ockhamistically, but rather, substantively; God, in the ultimate sense, is constitutive of goodness itself. God is the Good, essentially, by which all other goods find their source; and God always does that which is right. Theists generally draw a distinction, here, between the Creator, who is infinite, and the creature, who is finite. Since the world is ontologically distinct from and dependent on God ontologically, though originally created as

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\textsuperscript{73} Though, it seems to me that the only viable option, other than dualism, is something like panpsychism, which I will consider extensively in chapter three, when discussing process panentheistic views.

good, it can be corrupted and flawed. Creation’s original goodness, or any other good for that matter, is derivative from God and not so essentially. Such good things possess potentiality.

Pantheists, however, do not see things quite the same way. Rather than seeing AIDU as supremely good or perfectly good as theists do, some strands of pantheism see God as neither good nor evil; rather, the divine transcends such qualities. Consider the following passage from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

> One man believes he is the slayer, another believes he is the slain. Both are ignorant; there is neither slayer nor slain. You were never born; you will never die. You have never changed; you can never change. Unborn, eternal, immutable, immemorial, you do not die when the body dies. Realizing that which is indestructible, eternal, unborn, and unchanging, how can you slay or cause another to slay.\(^{75}\)

This passage affirms that ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are false categories and ultimately an illusion. But even for those Western pantheists who are more naturalistic in orientation, the categories of good and evil seem to be nothing more than human invention. Regarding good and evil, Harrison claims:

> The focus of pantheist reverence is not a good God. The Universe is neither good nor evil. The human categories of good and evil do not apply. It simply is. Again, this conception is easier to square with reality than the idea of an omnipotent and perfectly good God who allows or even causes devastating hurricanes, floods, epidemics claiming millions of lives—actions that in human terms would usually be seen as monstrously evil. The question why God would allow pain and evil to exist is one of the most difficult of all for theists to answer. Pantheists do not have to answer it. The Universe is what it is.\(^{76}\)

Furthermore,

> [T]he Universe has provided us all with an indescribably beautiful home and a consciousness with which to appreciate it. True, it could wipe us out tomorrow in a hurricane or a meteor strike—as could the “loving” God of theist religion. But natural disasters are easier to accept if you do not imagine there is a personal God sending them to destroy the innocent and the guilty alike, or creating a world in which such things happen. Nature does not plan or act out of anger or retribution: if a natural catastrophe strikes, it is

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\(^{75}\) Bhagavad Gita, 19-21.

\(^{76}\) Harrison, *Elements of Pantheism*, 44.
simply the working out of the laws of nature on the social and physical structures of humankind.\textsuperscript{77}

For Harrison, like many pantheistic Hindus, it would seem that the categories of good and evil are not the kinds of categories that one can ascribe to reality in any objective sense—they are merely “human categories.” Yet, it is interesting that Harrison criticizes the actions of the God of theism on what seems to be objective standards that hold true in all circumstances. If they are not objective in nature, then why the big fuss? It seems that Harrison feels the existential pull and weight of the injustice of such actions that he attributes to the theistic God. If there were such a God, He should not act in such a way. But why think that some set of actions are “monstrously evil” unless there is such a standard by which one can judge them? To claim that good and evil are only human categories takes the bite out of Harrison’s objection. Why think these human categories ought to apply toward God at all? Harrison does not say. But what of Harrison’s argument that natural disasters are easier to accept for pantheists over against theism? We cannot, here, deal with Harrison’s criticism of theism.\textsuperscript{78} For Harrison’s type of pantheism, the same God whom the pantheist worships is the same God that can wipe them out in an instant. Because AIDU is non-personal, it is indifferent to such tragedies. Furthermore, if one takes Harrison’s line of thought, could we truly call such tragedies “evil” in an objective sense? That is

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{78} The theistic response to evils that occur through nature will be considered more fully in later chapters. For now, theists no doubt would reject Harrison’s caricature and oversimplification of God’s dealings with humanity through natural disasters. It is not at all clear that the majority of theists think that something like ‘God’s dealing with people through nature’ is God’s primary \textit{modus operandi} for bringing about judgment on people. Most Jewish and Christian theists recognize that the Old Testament Scriptures portray certain instances of God using natural disaster to punish wickedness, but such instances are the exception and not the norm. Sadly, some theists, in light of recent tragedies, have suggested that certain natural disasters were the result of God’s judgment on a nation or group of peoples or because of a certain sin. Such statements are unwarranted and are a matter of conjecture. There is no reason to think that God’s use of nature to judge is a central part of theism. One cannot but help get the impression that Harrison is throwing out a straw man argument in order to make the pantheistic view more palatable for his readers.
just the way things happen. If we are to accept the pantheistic God of Harrison and the Gita, then
the criticism of Michael Peterson et al is fitting of such an understanding of the pantheistic God
and evil:

Perhaps the most striking point to be made, however, is that the God of pantheism cannot
distinguish between good and evil. All actions performed in the universe are equally
manifestations of the power of God; the notion that some of these actions are in an ultimate
sense “good” and others “evil” must in the end be dismissed as an illusion. Pantheists may
be, and often are, extremely upright and scrupulous in their personal ethics, but in the
ultimate perspective good and evil—or, what we call good and evil—are transcended.79

The pantheistic God, though the power of being in all things, cannot and does not really do
anything about evil. Pantheists consider the divine Unity as the source of value in the world, yet
it can make no real distinction between “good” and “evil.”80

Not all pantheists, however, wish to deny that good and evil are objective categories in
the world. But what counts as “good” and “evil” for such pantheists? How do they handle the
concept of evil within their systems? According to Levine, the traditional “problem of evil” does
not apply to pantheists, since pantheists reject those aspects of theism that generate the problem
(e.g., that God is all-good and all-powerful and yet evil exists in the world; that such things as
gratuitous evils exist and that a Good and all-loving God does nothing about them; and so on);
rather, the problem from evil is “peculiar” to theism alone. For theists, says Levine, “[e]vil’ is
essentially metaphysical rather than a moral concept; or it is a moral concept with a particular
theistic metaphysical commitment.”81 Nevertheless, pantheists have their own formulation of the
problem. He continues, “The pantheist may prefer, as most contemporary ethical theorists do, to

79 Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, Reason and Religious
Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 82-83.

80 Hasker, Metaphysics, 110.

81 Levine, Pantheism, 197.
talk of what is morally or ethically right and wrong. The term ‘evil’ could be retained and applied to particular (usually extreme) instances of moral wrongness, but it would be understood in a sense that divorces it from its original theological and metaphysical context.”

With respect to the divine Unity, pantheists do not claim that the divine Unity is all-good or omnibenevolent, nor is the divine Unity a “perfect being” (or a being at all, for that matter). “In theism,” claims Levine, “it is assumed that what is divine cannot also be (in part) evil. But why assume this is the case with pantheism?” He continues, “[t]here seems to be little reason to suppose that what is divine cannot also, in part, be evil. To say that everything that exists constitutes divine Unity (i.e. pantheism’s essential claim) need not be interpreted in such a way that it entails that all parts and every aspect of the Unity is divine or good. There can be a Unity and it can be divine without everything about it always, or even sometimes, being divine.”

Evil seems to be, then, for the pantheists, primarily a moral issue, fundamentally connected to the pantheist’s conception AIDU. To claim that some action is “evil,” it must be seen (in some sense) as a disruption of the divine Unity. But what exactly is “evil” for the pantheist? What exactly is the “good”? Are we to understand good and evil primarily in moral terms? Levine does not say. It is clear, however, that he rejects the theistic understanding of evil as privation. It may be that “privation” applies to pantheists in the sense that evil reflects a “disunity or the absence of whatever it is the pantheistic

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82 Ibid. Though, it seems, here, that Levine is confusing categories. He is blurring the lines between the “good” and the “right.” Issues of moral goodness have to do with axiological matters, while issues of moral rightness are deontological in nature. For a helpful discussion, see David Baggett and Jerry Walls, Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44.

83 Ibid., 208.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid., 212-214.
Unity is predicated upon.” It is not at all clear what Levine means by this. But what of the good? In his discussion on evil, Levine gives little attention to it. Should the notion of good, then, be predicated on whatever brings about pantheistic Unity?

Levine does, however, hold to a form of moral realism, which, as he claims, is generally the case for pantheists (or at least the brand of pantheism that he is promoting). There are objectively real moral facts in the world. Some things are ethically right or wrong independent of human beliefs about them. According to Levine, pantheists do not equate moral properties with natural properties, as some naturalists are wont to do. Such properties are not empirically verifiable. Rather, the pantheist, like the theist, will find such moral facts as “X is wrong” in something other than the natural; such facts are grounded in the non-natural. For theists, “X is wrong” finds explanation and partial analysis in God’s will and nature. Pantheists, on the other hand, find such facts explained and partially analyzed in “terms of (even if not reducible to) non-natural facts about the divine Unity.” Like Spinoza, Levine finds a strong connection between metaphysics and ethics. Regarding this point, Levine elaborates: “The belief in a divine Unity, and some kind of identification with that Unity, is seen as the basis for an ethical framework (and

86 Ibid., 213.

87 But that is the rub—on pantheism, everything contributes to the divine Unity. It seems that Levine is picking and choosing what does and does not contribute to AIDU, perhaps to make the pantheistic conception of God more palatable to his readers.


89 Ibid. It should be noted that Levine leaves open the possibility of a pantheist holding to something like ethical naturalism, if the pantheist were to make a case much in the same way that Richard Swinburne does for naturalistic theistic ethics.
‘way of life’) that extends beyond the human to non-human and non-living things. The divine Unity is, after all, ‘all-inclusive.’”90

The close connection and intricate interrelatedness between the human, non-human, earth, and divine Unity often lends to strong emphasis on environmental ethics. Pantheists often find such interrelatedness as advantageous over other systems. On this point Levine explains: “The pantheist’s ethic, her environmental ethic and her ethics more generally, will be metaphysically based in terms of the divine Unity. It will be based on the Unifying principle which accounts for an important commonality, and it will be the grounds for extending one’s notion of the moral community to other living and non-living things. Everything that is part of the divine Unity (as everything is) is also part of the moral community.”91 Here, Levine cites Taoism as an example of how this may work. For Taoists, the Tao (the way) is the unifying principle. What it means for one to act correctly is for one to act in accordance with the Tao. Levine explains:

In the context of the Tao Tê Ching (Taoism’s primary “scripture”) what the Tao is and how to act in accordance with it are explained in terms of one another. The Tao Tê Ching, like most other primary sacred sources, is at one and the same time an ethical treatise on how to live and a metaphysical treatise analyzing reality. One does not understand the Tao unless one understands what it means to live in accordance with it. Ethics are intrinsically related to the Tao, and “value” is associated with it at the most basic level.92

Another example available to the pantheist is the Hindu notion of karma, which can also be interpreted pantheistically. One can act either in accordance with or in defiance of the “all-

90 Ibid., 222.
91 Ibid., 233.
92 Ibid., 238.
pervasive principle” found within the karmic system. The principle by its very nature is “associated with value,” promoting the good.

In working out his pantheistic understanding of ethics, Levine opts for something similar to the divine command theory found in theism. He does not mean by “command” that AIDU gives commands as such and that such commands are to be followed; rather, the notion of commands have more to do with living in accordance to the Unity. For the pantheist, then, living in accordance with AIDU is the “ethically good” thing to do, while living defiantly toward or violating the Unity is “ethically wrong.” “What is right and wrong,” says Levine, “is to be explained by reference, essential reference in some cases, to the divine Unity, just as what is right and wrong for the theist is, in some cases, to be explained by reference to the nature of God.”

It seems, here, that Levine has provided a step up over naturalists and other pantheists, such as Harrison, in providing a way of thinking objectively about the metaphysics of good and evil and moral responsibility. Nevertheless, there are some difficulties with Levine’s system. First, while Levine finds the notions of “good” and “evil” and “moral rightness” and “moral wrongness” in relation to that which promotes or deviates from the pantheistic Unity, there is ambiguity in regards to just what it is that makes up that Unity. Levine spends quite a bit of space discussing what the divine Unity is not, but he never nails down just exactly what the

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93 It is important to keep in mind that Levine distinguishes between the Divine Unity and monism. For Levine, Divine Unity neither entails nor requires monism, which many have falsely misunderstood. It is for this reason that Levine believes that one can act in accordance to or against the Unity.

94 Ibid., 238.

95 Interestingly enough, this sounds more like natural law than it does a form of divine command theory.

96 Ibid.
divine Unity is. This is a common pattern among pantheists. If the pantheist expects his understanding of the God-world relation to be taken seriously, then he would need to bring greater clarity to just what he means by the divine Unity. Philosophically speaking, the way in which pantheists describe the divine Unity leaves one to question whether it really makes much difference if pantheism is true rather than if no God existed at all? As William Hasker says about the divine Unity, “Considering what is known of the universe, it is hard to see how it is a unity in any stronger sense than that it is a single space-time continuum in which things are interrelated according to a single set of natural laws.”

Second, while Levine is quick to argue that pantheism avoids the theistic problems of evil and that pantheism has a problem of evil unique to its own system, he does not say just what such a problem is. Levine defines evil ambiguously as that which disrupts the divine Unity. However, to say that evil disrupts the divine Unity does not really tell us anything much about evil itself. Moreover, Levine acknowledges that such a view of evil may count as a kind of “privation,” yet he is adamant that the pantheistic system avoids the theistic notion of evil based on a theistic metaphysic. But given that Levine holds to an objectivist view of moral rightness and wrongness, he is acknowledging that there is a way that something ought to be—a moral order of sorts (e.g., the Tao). But to suggest that something ought to be a certain way indicates that something is just not quite right—a kind of privation of the good. If this line of thinking is correct, then it is questionable whether Levine, and other pantheists, have fully escaped the problem of evil claimed to be “unique” to theism. But of course, the God of pantheism escapes

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99 One wonders if pantheists like Levine, Harrison, and Corrington take the problem of evil seriously. The inability to articulate what is intuitively an extremely difficult problem is a deficiency in any worldview.
the charge of the problem from evil in the sense that the pantheistic conception of God is neither all-loving nor all-powerful. Furthermore, the God of the pantheist is not the perfect being of the of God theism. But it should be noted that the God of pantheism is also non-responsive to evil in the world. Supposing that something like the Tao is true, what can such a unifying principle do about evil or the disruption of the divine Unity other than to suggest (if we can speak of a principle suggesting) a way that one ought to follow? Moreover, what can the divine Unity itself do? It would seem nothing more, at most, than to promote the good, and even that much is suspect. In Levine’s form of pantheism, humans are the only moral agents in the world; yet, humans are expected to do what the divine Unity itself cannot do—administer justice. What if humans reject the good? What then? Such a view of the God-world relation leaves us to question whether final justice will ever come about. Will the world’s wrongs ever be put to rights? We might think that some eternal principle, such as karma, may bring about final justice for atrocities performed by people. But how can a principle or force bring about justice? A force or principle has no intentions nor does it have any intelligence. But moreover, the notion of final justice could only be the case if there is such a thing as an afterlife. Levine, however, rejects both personal immortality and the hope for an afterlife. It is hard to see, then, how final justice can ever be fully brought about in such world.

100 Take, for example, the following argument from Layman regarding such impersonal laws: “Given that reincarnation and karma hold in the absence of any deity, the universe is governed not only by physical laws (such as the law of gravity) but by impersonal moral laws. These moral laws must be quite complex, for they have to regulate the connection between each soul’s moral record in one life and that soul’s total circumstances in the next life, including which body it has, its environment, and the degree of happiness (or misery) it experiences. Thus these impersonal moral laws must somehow take into account every act, every intention, and every choice of every moral agent and ensure that the agent receives nothing less than his or her just desserts in the next life. Now, the degree of complexity involved here is obviously very high, and it serves a moral end, namely, justice. But a highly complex structure that promotes justice can hardly be accepted as brute fact. Such a moral order cries out for explanation in terms of an intelligent cause. And if the moral order is on a scale far surpassing what can be attributed to human intelligence, an appeal to divine intelligence is justified. Hence, the moral order postulated by nontheistic reincarnation paradoxically provides evidence for the existence of a personal God.” C. Stephen Layman, “A Moral Argument for the Existence of God,” in Is Goodness without God Good Enough, edited by Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 58-59.
Concluding Matters

In the last two chapters I sought to accomplish two tasks. First, I sought to set out a methodology for comparing how metaphysical systems explain the phenomenon of evil in the world. Moreover, I sought to do so without assuming a particularly theistic understanding of evil, but one that could be accepted by most everyone. Second, I then considered how well naturalism and pantheism answered the question of evil in the world based on their own metaphysical assumptions. I will hold off on comparing them until Chapter Six. Let us now consider in the next two chapters panentheism and theism.
CHAPTER 4: METAPHYSICAL SYSTEMS AND EVIL PART 3

PROCESS PANENTHISM

Introduction

In the previous two chapters I began by comparing how well naturalism and pantheism explain the phenomenon of evil in the world. In the next two chapters I continue the comparative approach by giving consideration to panentheism and theism as possible candidates. Given that, like pantheism, there are a broad variety of panentheists—even among many Christians—I will focus attention primarily on Process panentheism. Having surveyed panentheism and theism as possible hypotheses for explaining the phenomenon of evil in the world, I will then compare those theories with the results from the previous chapters. Compared to the other systems, I argue that theism provides not only a better explanation for the phenomenon of evil in the world, but it also provides a more robust and overall thicker worldview response. Lastly, I consider the limitations of generic theism and argue that in order to provide a robust answer to the problem of evil, one must move from restricted theism to expanded theism, particularly Christian theism.

There is good reason to make this move, especially as one considers the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. As I will argue, generic theism is lacking in explaining how God can be essentially loving—a requirement for being essentially good—and yet a necessary eternal being.

Defining Panentheism

Like naturalism or pantheism, panentheism comes in many stripes and flavors. In its basic sense, the word ‘panentheism’ means something like “all-is-God-ism”\(^1\) or that the world is

in God. On the one hand, like pantheism, the entirety of the world is (in some sense) in God, but God has an identity and unity all His own. Yet, unlike pantheism, this unity is not identical with all of God’s finite parts. In this way, panentheism resembles theism in that God (in some sense) transcends the world.

The operative feature of how one understands panentheism lies in what one means by the word “in.” In a helpful typology, Niels Henrik Gregersen provides three possible forms of panentheism: “soteriological panentheism,” “expressivist panentheism,” and “dipolar panentheism.” Soteriological panentheism recognizes the “world’s being ‘in God’” is a gift and by the redeeming grace of God, and it is not something that is automatic. Moreover, not everything shares in God’s divine life, for example, sin and evil have no place in it. God becomes “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28) at the eschatological redemption and culmination of creation (Rom 8:18-21). On the other hand, expressivist panentheism is a form that follows Hegelian thought, in that the Spirit moves out from God into the processes of world history, only to eventually return back to God. Lastly, dipolar panentheism holds that God has two poles, one that is infinite, eternal, unchanging, and abstract while the other is finite, temporal, relative, and concrete. Gregersen identifies the process thought of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles

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3 Gregersen, “Three Varieties of Panentheism,” 21. For an extensive discussion on various distinctions among panentheists, see Cooper, *Panentheism*, 27-30. Cooper identifies five basic distinctions: 1) explicit and implicit panentheism; 2) personal and nonpersonal panentheism; 3) part-whole and relational panentheism; 4) voluntary and/or natural panentheism; and 5) classical (divine determinist) or modern (cooperative) panentheism.

4 Ibid.
Hartshorne, along with most other American process philosophers and theologians, with this latter form of panentheism.\(^5\)

Gregersen makes some further distinctions. He begins by qualifying what he means by generic panentheism. There are two basic features: 1) God contains the world and the world is (in some sense) in God; yet, God is also greater than the world; and 2) there are bilateral relations between the world and God, though the world is a creature and returns to God (again, in some sense). Regarding this latter point, the world affects God just as much as God affects the world. Having laid out his understanding of generic panentheism, Gregersen differentiates between what he calls “Strict (Dipolar) Panentheism” (henceforth SP) and “Qualified (Christian) Panentheism” (henceforth QP). SP has two basic features. First, analogous to how a soul must have a body, God, too, must have a world. It does not have to be this world. It could be any number of worlds—but God must coexist with a world in order to become fully actualized. Second, God and the world coexist and codetermine one another by metaphysical necessity. Not only does God influence the world but all temporal experiences become part of God’s nature. By necessity the world participates in divine life. QP differs from SP in that God could exist apart from the world. The soul and body analogy functions as a helpful metaphor to show divine immanence, but it does not require metaphysical necessity as does SP. Yet, QP, like SP, recognizes that once God has created the world, which is an act of divine grace, the world codetermines God, “so that temporal events may influence God and creatures share in the life of God; all that is redeemed participates in divine life.”\(^6\) Both SP and QP differ from classical

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid., 23.

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theism in that the relationship between the world and God is unilateral. While God affects the world, the world in no way affects God. As Gregersen spells it out:

The real difference, according to Thomas, is that the natures and activities of the creatures do not have a real feedback effect on God. There is, in other words, no return from the world into God. As pure activity (actus purus), God is the eternal realization of all positive predicates. Accordingly there is nothing God can “learn” in relation to the creatures, no “challenges” to be met, no free acts to “wait for.” The world is utterly dependent on God for its existence while the world cannot really affect the being or mind of God (Summa Theologia 1.28.a.1). In short, Thomas rejects not the first but only the second tenet of generic panentheism, as defined above.⁷

It is this aspect of God’s real relatedness to the world that panentheists have criticized classical theism of rejecting and which sets them apart.⁸

Besides God’s real relatedness to the world, there are several other reasons that panentheists gravitate to such a view on the God-world relation. Process philosopher and panentheist David Ray Griffin finds atheistic naturalism inadequate. For instance, atheistic naturalism, which equates the mind with the brain, cannot account for how the brain makes sense of human experience, since matter itself is devoid of any such experience. Moreover, it cannot account for the universal acceptance of religious experience, nor can it account for human freedom.⁹ Griffin further points out that atheistic naturalism cannot explain “the apparent

⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁸ Ibid., 23-24. Panentheists have also accused classical theists of denying God’s immanence. But Gregersen makes it clear that such is not the case. According to Gregersen, Thomas Aquinas understood that God is in everything; however, by this Aquinas did not mean that God somehow makes up or is in the substance of all things. Rather, he meant that God is the active agent in all things. God is actively sustaining and keeping all things in existence through His power and causation. That is why Aquinas could use the body/soul metaphor and speak of God as immanent. See also Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologia, 1.8.a.1.

objectivity of mathematics and logic,” nor “the order of the universe.” Phillip Clayton lists a variety of reasons some have accepted panentheism as a viable option, especially when compared to theism: 1) Panentheism may be more fulfilling than traditional theism; 2) panentheism is more compatible than traditional theism with recent findings in science; 3) panentheism does a better job of making sense of certain religious beliefs, such as divine action; 4) panentheism provides a mediating metaphysical position between eastern and western philosophy; 5) panentheism avoids certain objections to the problem of evil, which is a burden for traditional theism; and 6) classical theism has certain ethical and political implications not shared by panentheism.11

John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, in their book, Process Theology, provide additional reasons for rejecting traditional theism over process panentheism. Process panentheism rejects any notion of a God who controls all things, who is a cosmic moralist, who is unchanging and passionless, and male—all of which, according to the authors, is the classical theistic perspective of God.12 When the authors speak of God controlling all things, they mean that all events and all details within the world are determined by God. They also deny that God is immutable as understood by classical theists. They have in mind Thomas Aquinas’ understanding of God as being “altogether immutable,” which he develops from his

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10 Ibid., 42. Interestingly enough, Griffin calls his own view “naturalistic theism.” As we will see, the reason for such a label has to do with the fact that for process theologians and philosophers God is neither metaphysically prior to nature nor is God the primary metaphysical category (p. 43).


understanding of God as *actus purus*.\textsuperscript{13} It follows that if God is immutable then God is impassible, that is to say, God does not suffer in any sense—He is passionless. Their rejection of God as a cosmic moralist has to do with the denial of an understanding of God as a lawgiver and judge who has arbitrarily set laws in place. Such an understanding to the authors is a worst case scenario. They also reject the notion that God’s primary concern for His creatures is that they have certain moral attitudes. This, they think, is a secondary issue for humans, which, if such a position were true, would have God making it a primary one. Lastly, God as male paints a portrait of God as “sexually one-sided.”\textsuperscript{14}

Having observed some major distinctions between panentheists and having given some reasons as to why panentheists gravitate toward their understanding of the God-world relation, I will now spell out the kind of panentheism that will be considered in this chapter. Here I want to focus more on the SP and dipolar (and perhaps the expresivist) forms of panentheism distinguished by Gregersen above. QP, while a form of panentheism, boarders closely to theism, and especially the kind of theism that I am going to consider in Chapter Five.\textsuperscript{15} As specified, QP does not require that God create a world. In this case, God is metaphysically primary, which is similar to classical theism. The key qualifying difference between QP and classical theism is that God, for QP, is really affected by His creatures and that the creatures, in some sense, codetermine God, though Gregersen is unclear on what he means by “codetermine.” Theism can sympathize with such a view, given that many modern theists have rejected the classical theistic teaching that God is immutable in the absolute sense and, hence, not altogether impassible as

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\textsuperscript{13} Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, 1.9.a.1

\textsuperscript{14} Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 8-10.

\textsuperscript{15} I believe that Christian theism provides the resources to gain some of the same results sought after in this form of panentheism, for example a God who is really related to the world, yet without the intended consequences of panentheism.
theists such as Thomas Aquinas believed. But it may be argued, as many theists have done, one can avoid panentheism by adopting something like theological essentialism, which I will consider more extensively in Chapter Five. For now, we shall consider the philosophical and theological process thought of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne.

Alfred North Whitehead

Perhaps no thinker in twentieth century has done more to bring back metaphysics as a respectable enterprise within theological circles than Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). Philosopher Stephen T. Davis has suggested that “Whitehead’s philosophical system is one of the most brilliant intellectual accomplishments of the twentieth century.” He is one of the first thinkers to formulate a systematic process philosophy, which is most fully represented in his magnum opus, Process and Reality.

Primary Categories

As with all process thought, central is the notion that everything that is “actual” is in process. Whitehead calls his own system a “philosophy of organism” and Victor Lowe expresses it in the following way: “Whitehead’s amazing philosophical achievement is the construction of a system of the world according to which the basic fact of existence is everywhere some process of self-realization, growing out of previous processes and itself adding


19 Ibid., 21.
a new pulse of individuality and a new value to the world.”\textsuperscript{20} Lowe further describes Whitehead’s system as “pluralistic.”\textsuperscript{21} The reason for this has to do with Whitehead’s rejection of the view that there is only one individual who is “ultimate.”\textsuperscript{22}

Fundamental to Whitehead’s “philosophy of organism” is the postulation that “creativity,” the “many,” and the “one” make up the “Ultimate.”\textsuperscript{23} This stands in stark contrast to classical theism, which understands God as ultimate and all other entities that exist as contingent and owing their existence to God. Moreover, the classical theistic understanding of God holds that God is eternal, immutable, and impassible. God is not affected by anything outside of Himself. This is not the case with Whitehead’s view, however.

In working out his speculative philosophy, Whitehead employed a variety of new terms and concepts to articulate the contours of his overall system. There are three primary terms that are critical for understanding Whitehead’s philosophy: “actual entities,” “prehension,” and “creativity.”\textsuperscript{24} Actual entities, or “actual occasions” as they are sometimes called, refer to “the final real things of which the world is made up.”\textsuperscript{25} Whitehead did not think that one can go behind actual entities. All are uniquely different and are considered to be “drops of experience”;


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{25} Whitehead, \textit{Process and Reality}, 18.
nevertheless, they are “interdependent.”

He viewed actual entities as the “cells’ of the universe.” Lowe describes Whitehead’s notion of actual entities in the following way:

Each pulse of existence—Whitehead calls them “actual entities”—requires the antecedent others as its constituents, yet achieves individuality as a unique, finite synthesis; and when its growth is completed, stays in the universe as one of the infinite number of settled facts from which the individuals of the future will arise.

Thus unlike philosophical systems that stress “being” over “becoming,” actual entities do not have sustained permanence over time. Each actual entity is, in the words of Charles Hartshorne, “a momentary state or single instance of process or becoming.” But becoming does not have to do so much with change, for actual entities are unchanging. Rather, becoming has more to do with “addition” and not “subtraction.”

According to Whitehead, each experience is not independent, but interrelated, dependent, and inseparable from other experiences. Each momentary experience (actual occasion) is related to previous experiences. He refers to such a relation as a “prehension.” As John Cobb and David Griffin suggest in regards to prehensions: “The present occasion ‘prehends’ or ‘feels’ the previous occasions. The present occasion is nothing but its process of unifying the particular prehensions with which it begins.” The entire process of the unification of experience is known

26 Ibid.
27 Lowe, 13.
28 Ibid., 4.
30 Ibid.
31 Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 19; Whitehead, Process and Reality, 19.
32 Ibid., 19-20.
as “concrescence.” There are two aspects to every prehension, the first is the “objective datum,” which has to do primarily with the “content” of the prehension, whereas the second, the “subjective form,” refers to the thing that has been felt, and how it has been felt. Griffin gives an analogy of how the two might occur. Say, for example, that a person sees a big dog walking down the street; the “objective datum” is found in the content of the prehension. In this case, it refers to the big dog as appearing to the person (the experience). The “subjective form,” however, refers to the kind of emotion that is produced by the datum.

Another important feature of Whitehead’s thought is “creativity.” It is for Whitehead the central metaphysical principle of the universe—“the universal of universals.” Whitehead goes on to say that “[i]t is the ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively.” According to Hartshorne, creativity is Whitehead’s “intuition” . . . of the act of existing. That this is not a single substance or a mere attribute seems clear. It is not God, because each creature exists by its own act of existing, dependent to be sure upon antecedent acts, including the antecedent actions of deity. But finally each actuality exists by its own self-activity: it is creative, however trivially, of new determinateness, thereby enriching reality as previously there, including divine reality as previously there.

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35 Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 277.


37 Ibid.

Thus, in some sense, because all that is actual is in process, including God, and because all that is actual is interrelated and interdependent, creatures “enrich” or “enhance” and “contribute” to the “divine life.” Moreover, because each actual entity is in the process of becoming, and because such self-creation is necessary and not contingent—a fundamental aspect of reality—this raises several implications about God and the God-world relation. If all actual entities possess the ability of self-creation, necessarily, then such is, as Griffin says, “beyond all volition, even God’s.”

God and the World

As noted throughout, Whitehead rejects the Aristotelian view of God simply as the “unmoved mover” that has pervaded classical Christian thought. God does not stand over and against the world. Moreover, He did not create the world out of nothing, nor is God “before all creation”; rather, God is “with all creation.” In Whitehead’s view, God is no exception to metaphysical principles; “He is their chief exemplification.” Thus God and the world are intricately connected. Not only does God affect the world, but the world affects God.

Whitehead understands God as having two poles which make up His essential nature. In other words, God’s nature is “dipolar.” The first pole he calls the “primordial” pole. The primordial pole of God is infinite and unlimited in regards to potentiality. Moreover, it is

39 Ibid., 43.
40 David Ray Griffin, God, Power, and Evil, 278.
41 Whitehead, Process and Reality, 343.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 345.
impersonal and “conceptual.” In regards to the primordial side of God’s nature, Whitehead makes the following comment:

One side of God’s nature is constituted by his conceptual experience. This experience is the primordial fact in the world, limited by no actuality which it presupposes. It is therefore infinite, devoid of all negative prehensions. This side of his nature is free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient, and unconscious.

God’s second pole, the “consequent” pole, is “personal,” “conscious,” and concrete. It “is the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom.” This side of God’s nature, says Whitehead, “originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world, and then requires integration with the primordial side. It is determined, incomplete, consequent, ‘everlasting,’ fully actual, and conscious.”

For Whitehead, God is not the all-powerful sovereign who reigns over creation. His power is not unlimited “controlling” omnipotence, but, rather, it is “persuasive.” The reason for this has to do, not so much with a moral issue, or whether or not God limits His power, but because it is impossible for God. On this point Griffin explains: “God does not refrain from controlling the creatures simply because it is better for God to use persuasion, but because it is necessarily the case that God cannot completely control the creatures.”

Whitehead rejected Aristotle’s notion that God could not be aware of the world. Instead, in his view, God knows and loves His creatures intimately. For God to be “moved” by His creatures, demonstrates God’s ability to sympathize with them, or, in other words, to “love”
them. Love is God’s chief attribute. Whitehead criticized Aquinas on this point. In the Thomistic view, any relation that takes place between God and His creatures is only a real relation for the creature, not for God. God is not affected by the creature. For Whitehead, only a God that can sympathize with His creatures is a God worthy of worship.\textsuperscript{49}

Because God’s primary means of interacting with the world is through persuasion, He provides each actual entity with an “initial aim.”\textsuperscript{50} In providing the initial aim, God’s purpose is that the subject will choose through the occasion the best option. However, whatever actualizes is up to the subject. That which the subject chooses becomes the “subjective aim.”\textsuperscript{51} Cobb and Griffin provide a helpful explanation of the outcome of God’s work in Creation:

The subject may choose to actualize the initial aim; but it may also choose from among the other real possibilities open to it, given its context. In other words, God seeks to persuade each occasion toward the possibility for its own existence which would be best for it; but God cannot control the finite occasion’s self-actualization. Accordingly, the divine creative activity involves risk. The obvious point is that, since God is not in complete control of the events of the world, the occurrence of genuine evil is not incompatible with God’s beneficence toward all his creatures.\textsuperscript{52}

Thus the ultimate outcome for the shape of the world is not up to God, so to speak, but up to God and the world, since each actual entity has within it the capability of self-creation and self-actualization.

\textbf{Charles Hartshorne}

Having examined several of the core categories and tenets of Whitehead’s philosophy, it is now possible to examine and explicate more clearly the process theology of Charles

\textsuperscript{49} Hartshorne, \textit{Whitehead’s View}, 12.

\textsuperscript{50} Cobb and Griffin, 52.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 52-53.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 53.
Hartshorne. One central feature of Hartshorne’s system is his attack on classical Christian theism. Like Whitehead before him, Hartshorne rejects many of the core tenets of classical Christian theism. Hartshorne works out his own system by recognizing the inadequacies of the classical Christian view while embracing the process metaphysics espoused by Whitehead. In what follows, an examination of Hartshorne’s critique of classical Christian theology will be considered, along with an examination of Hartshorne’s own conception of God.

Critique of Classical Theism

Too often, says Hartshorne, philosophers and theologians in the West have stressed “being” over “becoming.” Greek philosophy often depreciated “becoming” and placed emphasis on “being.” This is true of Aristotle who argued that God is the “unmoved mover.” Because of Aristotle’s emphasis on the notion of God as immutable, he rejected that God could have any real knowledge of a changing world. Christian theologians, especially during the Middle Ages, adopted the Aristotelian understanding of the immutable and impassible God. Christian theists, however, argues Hartshorne, are not willing to let go of the notion that God is aware of what is happening within a changing world. This prima facie seems to be contradictory.53

This notion of immutability is also carried over to a view of God’s omniscience. On this point Hartshorne says,

And indeed, immutable omniscience, implying the immutability of all truth, consorts ill with the view that becoming is real. If there is novel reality, then to that extent the truth also must be novel. To say of future events that they “are going to be” is to imply that their entire character is a present fact, though a fact which, with our human limitations, we have not yet reached. But there the fact is, waiting for us to reach it, or there it is offstage, waiting to come on. In this view, genuine becoming is missing. The truth, the reality, is eternally there,

spread out to the divine gaze, though our present experience, being localized in the eternal panorama, cannot behold most of it.”

If such a conception of immutable omniscience is the case, then it is hard to see how anything can truly have freedom, even God Himself. “Whatever God is, that he could not fail to be: hence if God is the decider who wills ‘let there be such and such a world,’ he could not have failed to be that very decider. Wherein is the freedom?” Moreover, such a conception seems to make God religiously unavailable to His creatures. Hartshorne believes that worship of “the infinity of God’s power” is “idolatry.” This is a charge that he often brings against classical theists.

The Concept of God

What of Hartshorne’s own concept of God? In order to form a more adequate concept of God and the God-world relation, Hartshorne lists five principles that must be in place. First, such a philosophy must not place “being” over “becoming.” Second, such a philosophy must avoid the notion that all of existence is contingent, since there are things that exist that clearly do not depend on other things for their existence, namely mathematics and logic. Third, indeterminism must be an aspect to such a view. Fourth, within such a theistic system, other subjects other than God must share in creation. Fifth, such a system must emphasize relations that take place both internally and externally, as emphasized on Whitehead’s theory of prehensions. Hartshorne calls his own view “Neoclassical theism.” The reason for this is that for Hartshorne, the God of PT is not merely “infinite” and “absolute,” nor is He the “uncaused cause”; rather,

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54 Ibid.


57 Ibid., 27.
God is not on one side only of categorical contrasts; he is not merely infinite or merely finite, merely absolute or merely relative, merely cause or merely effect, merely agent or merely patient, merely actual or merely potential, but in all cases both, each in suitable respects or aspects of his living reality, and in such a manner as to make him unsurpassable by another. He is even both joy and sorry, both happiness and sympathetic participation in our griefs.  

He does reject the notion, however, that God is both “goodness and wickedness.” Thus in his Neoclassical theistic view, Hartshorne seeks to hold on to certain aspects of traditional theism, while rejecting those aspects which go against any process or becoming in God. Like Whitehead, Hartshorne’s conception of God is dipolar. This is the crux of his philosophical and theological system. Hartshorne sees the importance of holding to the two aspects of God’s nature, which includes “both sides of the metaphysical contraries.” It is not enough, merely to hold to one aspect or the other; rather, it is important to emphasize that, even though there is contingency within God, He is a perfect being. But Hartshorne does not mean perfection in the same way that classical Christian theologians do. Traditionally, it has been thought that a perfect being cannot grow in greatness nor can such a being decrease in metaphysical stature. However, according to Hartshorne, God does not need to be “absolute”; rather, it is conceivable to think of a perfect being that, while He cannot decrease in metaphysical value, He can, nevertheless attain and grow in greatness. It is conceivable to think that God is, in this regards, the most perfect being. Hartshorne calls this dual aspect in God’s nature the “principle of dual transcendence.” By this...

58 Ibid., 74-75.
59 Ibid., 75.
61 Ibid.
63 Hartshorne, From Aquinas to Whitehead, 22.
he means that “God is, in uniquely excellent ways, both necessary and contingent, both infinite and finite, independent and dependent, eternal and temporal.”

Some have charged Hartshorne’s notion of the principle of dual transcendence with contradiction. How can something have two contradictory aspects together at the same time? For example, how is it possible that God is both timeless and temporal? Moreover, how can something be unchanging and yet change. Hartshorne believes he escapes this charge by arguing that someone or something can change in some respects but not in others. He goes on to say,

The world may be finite spatially and infinite temporally. God may be immutable in his ultimate purpose but adopt new specific objectives in response to new acts by the creatures. He may exist necessarily so far as his essence is concerned but contingently so far as inessential qualities are in question. The two aspects are not on the same ontological level; for the essence or ultimate purpose is abstract and the specific aims concrete. And we can appeal to the Aristotelian principle that the abstract is real in the concrete. God may have infinite potentialities but finite actuality. Potentialities are abstractions, only the actual is concrete. Moreover, it is possibilities that are infinite; actuality is always a decision among possibilities, excluding some from realization. Any possible state of the world would be content of God’s knowledge if it were actual, but not even God can contradictorily enjoy all possible world states as actual for there are mutually incompossible ones. Even the supreme artist must have something undone. Moreover, his creatures so far as free must do so also, and what they exclude is excluded even for God. God would have had me as doer of some deed I might have performed, but since I did not perform it he now can never have that possible me.

Thus God is, on one hand, the “simplest,” while on the other, “the most complex.”

By speaking of God in such a way, so as to stress both aspects of His nature, one can truly say that “God is love.” In order to love, one must have the capacity to rejoice and to

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid. 23.
66 Ibid. 23-24.
67 Ibid. 24.
68 Hartshorne, A Natural Theology, 75.
sorrow with others, which entails that one have the capacity to be influenced by others. Such is not the case with the classical conception of God.

**Process Panentheism and Evil**

Having examined the process thought of Whitehead and Hartshorne, how are we to think of the panentheism of process thought (henceforth PPT) and evil? Following the format in the previous chapters, four areas that be considered: life, consciousness, the metaphysics of good and evil, and human responsibility.

**Process Panentheism and Life**

After all, if PPT is to explain evil, it must also explain life—given that evil has to do with the existence of sentient creatures who experience pain and suffering in the world. But, in order to explain life, a metaphysical system must also be able to explain the existence and nature of the universe.

When it comes to the nature of the universe, Process theologians reject creation *ex nihilo*, opting for something more like the Platonic view that God created the world out of already pre-existing matter (*ex materia*). In a helpful passage, David Ray Griffin provides a look at God’s relationship to the world and the Process view of creation:

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69 Not all panentheists opt for this view, which is one of the reasons that I focus on Process panentheism in this chapter and not other forms of panentheism. Some panentheists, like Jürgen Moltmann, hold to a more Christian understanding of creation, opting for creation *ex nihilo*. Yet, Moltmann is a panentheist in the sense that, following the ancient Jewish Kabala tradition of God's “self-limitation” (*zimsum*), God makes room or space within God’s self. In that sense, creation is *in* God, yet, God is distinct from the rest of creation. There is another sense in which Moltmann is panentheistic. For Moltmann, the relationship between the world and God is a “reciprocal” one. If God is love, then there is a real sense in which God not only gives love, but also that God needs love. Creation itself is a necessity in that God created in order to bring about an “Other” that is unlike the “Other” within God. See *God in Creation*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 86-93; *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 19, 98-99, 105.
According to process panentheism, God is essentially soul of the universe. Although God is distinct from the universe, God’s relation to it belongs to the divine essence. This does not mean, however, that our particular universe—with its electrons, inverse square law, and Plank’s constant—exists necessarily. This universe was divinely created, evidently about 15 billion years ago. It was even created out of “no-thing” in the sense that, prior to the creation, there were no enduring individuals sustaining a character through time (such as quarks and photons), which is what is usually meant by “things.” With Berdyaev, therefore, we can say that it was created out of relative nothingness. This relative nothingness was a chaos of events, each of which embodied some modicum of “creativity,” which is the twofold power to exert self-determination and then efficient causation on subsequent events. Each event in this chaos, therefore, influenced future events after being influenced by prior events, so that the creation of our universe was not the beginning of temporal relations and hence of time. It was, however, the beginning of the particular contingent form of order that physicists have been progressively discovering. Our universe began when God got this order instantiated in what had previously been a chaotic situation consisting of extremely brief, trivial, random happenings in which no significant values could be realized.70

It would seem, here, that Griffin has quite a few things going on that need unpacking.

First, like Whitehead, Griffin recognizes that God has a significant role in the formation of the universe, much like the Platonic Demiurge. For Plato, the Demiurge infuses chaotic matter with form.71 In that light only can He be called “Creator.” In much the same way, God, for process thinkers, gets the whole process of our current universe going. God is not primary. God is neither the source of the universe’s being nor is God the source of the built-in self-creativity that makes up the underlying structure of the universe. But what is this self-creativity and why is it the primary metaphysical principle (or, at least, one of the primary metaphysical principles)? Furthermore, why think that the PPT view of the universe, along with its metaphysical underpinnings, is the correct one?

As we have seen, self-creativity is a central feature of Whitehead’s metaphysics—something that all process thinkers hold common in their view of the God-world relationship.

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70 Griffin, Panentheism, 43.

Unlike theism, PPT recognizes that God’s *modus operandi* of activity in the world is, indeed, one of persuasive activity rather than controlling activity. Some theists also embrace the notion of persuasive over controlling activity; however, the theistic view is different in that God does this out of God’s self-limitation. The reason is moral in nature. For defenders of PPT, on the other hand, the reason for God’s persuasive activity in the world is metaphysical. In other words, God has no power to control—only the power to persuade. It is a matter of necessity that God cannot control anything outside of God’s self.\textsuperscript{72}

The metaphysical category behind this necessity that we are now here concerned with is, as we saw earlier, what Whitehead calls the “ultimate,” and, as noted, the ultimate involves three elements: “creativity,” “many,” and “one.” According to Griffin,

\begin{quote}
‘Creativity’ (by which the many become one and are increased by one) is a universal feature of actuality. It is inherent in actuality (AI 230). This does not mean that creatures derive their creative power from themselves, or that they are not dependent upon God for their existence. But it does mean that to be an actuality is to exercise creativity and that there is necessarily a realm of finite actualities with creativity of their own.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

But this notion of the ultimate is precisely one of the peculiarities of this view. I would agree with Stephen Davis on this point that Process ontology raises some troubling difficulties. For Whitehead and other PT thinkers, there are no enduring substances; rather, what we have is something more like enduring events. Events consist of real changes in a thing, or, at least, relational changes between things. As Davis notes, this stands in contrast to the Aristotelian view, adopted by classical Christian theists (we will follow Davis in calling this Aristotelian

\textsuperscript{72} Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 276.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
ontology), whereby a thing is said to be “an enduring object with properties, relations, and an identity apart from other things.”

Defenders of PPT are wont to reject any hint of Aristotelian ontology by denying that entities have substances altogether. But denying substances is difficult to do, even if something like actual occasions are true. Davis suggests that there are at least two reasons to think that process thinkers do not escape Aristotelian ontology. First, if these events endure for any finite amount of time, then such are, indeed, substances by virtue of being enduring property bearers. To say that these events do not endure would lead us to think that they are nothing more than mere limits or boundaries, much like Euclidian points. But why think boundaries can do things like create or consist within reality? Second, if Aristotle was correct in thinking that a substance persists through time, one can explain what a thing is without an event. However, the opposite is not true. We cannot explain events without reference to or presupposing things. In other words, things are individuated by their properties and relations; whereas events are individuated by things. A thing can exist without an event. After all, we can imagine a possible world whereby only immutable objects exist. Yet, it is difficult for us to imagine some event taking place apart from some entity. Substances, then, are ontologically superior to events. If Davis’s arguments are correct (and I believe that they are), then we cannot do without substances. But even the more, this would cripple Whitehead’s view that creativity lies behind the basic structure of reality, since events are not ontologically prior.

There is yet another difficulty that we run up against in Process metaphysics—a difficulty that, as we saw in the previous chapter, pantheists, too, run up against. If God is not the primary

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75 Ibid., 127-128.
organizing source in the universe, as important as God is to the process system of thought, then what is? How can we explain the unity? In the Whiteheadian view of things, we have God and the multiplicity of others, all of which work together to make a tight unified overarching system. But how is this the case? W. Norris Clarke argues that Whitehead falls prey to the same difficulty that Plato faced. He explains it as follows:

> If there is to be any ultimate source of unity in the universe at all—which is dubious, just as it was for Plato—it seems to be pushed back beyond even God to an inscrutable, faceless, amorphous force of creativity, which is just there, everywhere in the universe, as a primal fact with no further explanation possible—a kind of generalized necessity of nature, with striking similarities to the ancient Greek Ananke.\footnote{Clarke, \textit{The Philosophical Approach to God}, 102.}

But the problem is further complicated. Creativity is not an actuality in-and-of-itself, says Clarke; rather, it is “a generalized abstract description of what is a matter of fact instantiated in every actual occasion of the universe. Creativity seems to be an ultimate primordial many, with no unifying source.”\footnote{Ibid.} Clarke describes this as an “irreparable deficiency” that any “dualism” or “multiplicity” faces when not grounded in the “prior unity of creative mind.”\footnote{Ibid.} Further, if such creativity does not find its source ultimately in God, from whence does it come? “[W]hy,” asks Clarke, “does this creativity continue to spring forth endlessly and inexhaustibly, all over the universe, in each new actual occasion, from no actually existing source?”\footnote{Ibid., 103.} It would seem as though such bursts of individual self-creativity, which bring about each and every actual occasion, emerges \textit{ex nihilo}, since there is no prior source. Some friends of PPT bite the bullet and recognize the difficulty, suggesting that if one were to grant this first step all else follows.
Clarke (and most other theists) finds such an enigma too high a price to pay and metaphysically untenable.  

Lastly, regarding panentheism and life, it seems that process panentheists run up against the same problem of infinite regress that both naturalists and pantheists face. I will not rehearse those issues here, but will only stress that one must face the complications implicit in positing an infinite universe (or multiverse). Furthermore, in positing something like evolution behind the PPT portrait of the emergence of sentient life (or biological life in general), it would seem that process panentheists have, as we will consider below, a better theory behind the process of evolution than, say, naturalists do (since there is, at least, something—God—giving each actual occasion an initial direction or aim); however, as specified earlier, defenders of PPT will need to sort out just what lies behind Whitehead’s notion of creativity. Until they are capable of doing so, it would seem that defenders of PPT are at a metaphysical disadvantage for explaining life within the universe.

In what follows, I will consider in more detail how evolutionary theory dovetails with the process theory of consciousness. This will also setup a discussion on the process view of the metaphysics of good and evil.

**Process Panentheism and Consciousness**

Keeping in line with our approach, any metaphysical system that attempts to explain evil must also explain consciousness. How does PPT fare with respect to consciousness?

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80 Ibid., 104.

81 For further discussion see Chapter Three.
Consciousness is grounded in experience; yet while consciousness presupposes experience, experience itself is not consciousness.\(^{82}\) For defenders of PPT, then, there is no separation between an entity and experience, nor is there any dualism between entities that experience and entities that do not experience. There are, nevertheless, different levels of experiences among entities. In order to see this, one must grasp the central role evolution plays in PPT ontology, along with the key process concepts of “concrescence” and “transition,” which are central to the process view of creativity.\(^{83}\)

The evolutionary development of our world is a manifestation of God’s work and creative purposes in the world.\(^{84}\) Whitehead called each stage of the evolutionary process of the universe “cosmic epochs.” Central to each epoch is a particular form of order. God’s purpose in bringing order out of the chaos is to evoke certain intensities among the occasions by means of persuasion. God sends each actual occasion an “initial aim.” It is up to the occasion to accept or reject the aim. Order is needed to maintain the intensity among the various occasions, thus God seeks to bring about and maintain order through each initial aim, which occurs through God’s

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\(^{82}\) Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 17.

\(^{83}\) “An occasion comes into being as an experiencing subject. The data of its experience are provided by previous actual occasions. Its reception of these data is called its “feelings” or “positive prehensions” of those previous occasions. (There are also “negative prehensions,” which are said to “exclude from feeling.”) It becomes a unified subject by integrating these feelings. . . . When the process of concrescence is complete, so that the actual occasion has achieved a unified experience of all its data and its subjective reactions to them (each feeling has its “objective datum” and its “subjective form” of response to the datum), the occasion becomes an objective experience, i.e., an object from other subjects. Its subjectivity perishes, and it thereby acquires objectivity. It transmits some of its feelings to subsequent actual occasions, . . . These two processes, concrescence and transition, embody the two forms of creativity, the two types of power, inherent in each actual occasion. The process of concrescence embodies the occasion’s power of self-determination, its power of final causation. Although the present occasions is largely determined by the power of the past upon it, it is never thus completely determined.” Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, 277-278.

\(^{84}\) Note that in the initial chaos, there were no “enduring objects”—not even the most primitive kinds (e.g., electrons, neutrons, or protons). These occasions would happen “at random” without any order. Nevertheless, such a state would retain value because of the occasions themselves. Ibid., 285-286.
persuasive power. Each stage of the evolutionary process is gradual, bringing more and more order out of chaos.

Actual occasions, retaining the datum from prior prehensions, begin to form into societies, beginning with the most primitive of forms, such as the proton, neutron, or electron, on to the atom and molecule, and finally up to more complex enduring entities such as the cell. With each advancement, enduring entities increase in intrinsic value. It should also be noted that each actual occasion has its own “mental pole.” This does not mean that every occasion has some form of thought or consciousness; rather, “mentality” refers to the occasion’s ability to receive and respond to data from other actualities.85 In this case, then, PPT is a form of “panpsychism” or, more specifically, “panexperientialism,” as Griffin calls it.86 As actual occasions become more complex structured societies, they increase in intensity and beauty, and hence in intrinsic value. The “soul” or “psyche” is not, however, something ontologically different from other things; rather, “[i]t is simply a higher-level series of occasions of experience.”87 Given the Process notion of panexperientialism, consciousness, then, is not so much a function of the brain; rather, it is a function of experience.88 It is, in the words of Griffin, a “very high-level form of experience, enjoyed by relatively few individuals.”89


86 Ibid., 248. See also Whitehead’s Radically Different, 58-61.

87 Ibid., 290.

88 Griffin, Whitehead’s Radically Different, 62.

89 Ibid., 59.
The Process understanding of consciousness, compared with, say, materialism, is quite impressive and novel, to say the least. Yet, the panexperientialism of PPT is not without its difficulties. It suffers from many of the same difficulties as its older cousin, panpsychism. We shall now turn to some objections to panexperientialism?

One of the central issues of the Process view of panexperientialism is, as we have already discussed, the problem with Whitehead’s metaphysics and ontology. It is not at all clear that experience stands as the fundamental ontological structure of reality, and it is hard to think that Process thinkers believe that it is experience all the way down, either. To show this, let us consider a passage of Griffins where this comes out:

Each event . . . is experiential from beginning to end, which means that, in distinction from usage reflecting dualism, the physical aspect of the event is not devoid of experience, hence the mental aspect is not uniquely associated with experience. An event’s mentality is simply its experience insofar as it is self-determining. Whitehead emphasizes the experiential nature of unit-events by calling them “occasions of experience.”

Griffin is considered to be one of the ablest Process thinkers alive today, and I believe that he has explained the above concept as clearly as one might be able. Yet, even with such clarity it seems that he cannot but help fall into what sounds like substance language. In order to speak of both

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90 To be fair to Process thinkers, panpsychism and panexperientialism are not exactly the same thing, however. According to Griffin, panpsychism refers to the view that all things have a “psyche” or a “high-grade, conscious mentality.” Panexperientialism, on the other hand, recognizes that certain aggregates, such as sticks and stones, do not have a “unified” or “high-grade” experience. Rather, only “genuine individuals” have such an experience. There are two basic kinds of genuine individuals: “simple individuals” and “compound individuals.” Simple individuals are the “most elementary units of nature,” such as quarks; whereas compound individuals are comprised of simpler individuals, such “as when atoms are compounded out of subatomic particles, molecules out of atoms, living cells out of macromolecules, and animals out of cells.” Compound individuals are true individuals because each of the parts contributes to a higher level of experience. It is this higher level of experience that becomes the “dominant” member, which provides unity of both experience and action. A further difference between the two is that panexperientialism does not consider each genuine individual to have consciousness, though they have a unified experience. As already noted, Whitehead’s notion of the “mental” is not the same thing as consciousness, but has more to do with a minimal ability within an entity to have some basic level of experience. Despite these distinctions, there are enough similarities that panexperientialism could warrant some of the same critiques of panpsychism. David Ray Griffin, Whitehead’s Radically Different Postmodern Philosophy: An Argument for Its Contemporary Relevance (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 59.

91 Ibid., 61.
“experience” and “event,” he must employ words like “physical aspect” or “mental aspect,” even if it seems that he is equating the mental with experience itself. Nevertheless, he cannot but help speak of the event or experience apart from that to which it is happening. Now, it would seem absurd to think that the experience is experiencing itself. But perhaps that is what Griffin and other Process thinkers have in mind. Either way, I find such a view difficult to accept on metaphysical grounds.\footnote{A recent article from \textit{Process Studies} has made an interesting case that both process and substance are required. One cannot have the one without the other. See Richard Mattessich, “No Substance without Process, No Process without Substance, and Neither without Energy: Some Thoughts and Extensions on Whitehead and the Endurants (Continuants) v. Perdurants (Occurrents) Controversy,” \textit{Process Studies Supplement} 19 (2014): 1-36. Accessed January 30, 2015. http://www.ctr4process.org/publications/ProcessStudies/PSS/PSS_19_2014-Mattessich.pdf.} Even more, it seems that much of Whitehead’s rejection of substance had to do with a Cartesian understanding of substance, and not the classical notion, which understood substance, in the words of W. Norris Clark, “as active nature imbedded in a network of relations resulting from its acting and being acted on.”\footnote{W. Norris Clarke, \textit{Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, and Person} (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2008), 102. See also pp. 109-110.} Lastly, there are problems, as we have seen, with thinking that creativity is the primary metaphysical principle behind the four-dimensional space-time universe.

Even if one were to grant the Process metaphysical and ontological understanding of reality (which I am unwilling to do), there is a further problem with panpsychism/panexperientialism—a problem philosopher J. P. Moreland calls “the Combination Problem” (henceforth CP).\footnote{J. P. Moreland, \textit{Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument} (New York: Routledge, 2008), 128.} Moreland states CP in the following way:

\begin{quote}
There are different ways of stating the problem. For example, if each particle of matter has its own unified point of view, how do they combine to form the same sort of unity when they interact to form larger wholes, a unity that appears to be unanalyzable and primitive? How do low-order experiences of ultimate atomic simples combine to form a single, unified field of consciousness or a unified self in larger wholes? Some panpsychists hold that all
\end{quote}
composed objects above the level of atomic simples have their own unified consciousness while others distinguish mere mereological aggregates without such a unity from “true individuals” that have it. Those who make such a distinction face two additional problems: How does one characterize the difference between the two? How could “true individuals” arise from processes that are combinatorial?\footnote{Ibid.}

Moreland’s understanding of CP is largely set against the backdrop of panpsychism, but it seems that he has something like PPT’s panexperientialism in mind, especially with respect to the Process distinction between aggregates and “true” or “genuine” individuals. How might we formulate CP specifically to PPT? Following Moreland here, it seems that there are three unique questions that the defender of PPT will need to face regarding what we will call the “panexperientialist combination problem” (henceforth PECP).

(1) How is it that actual occasions combine to form into larger societies?

(2) How do we draw the line between “aggregates” and “genuine individuals”?

(3) How could “genuine individuals” arise from such combinatorial processes?

Having stated PECP, I will begin with (2) and then take (1) and (3) together, since the answer to (3) anticipates both (1) and (2).

Regarding (2), Griffin makes a distinction between mere “aggregates” and “genuine individuals.” There are two kinds of genuine individuals—“simple” and “compound.” What is it, however, that qualifies some entity a genuine individual? We have such things as animals, human beings, single-celled organisms, viruses, molecules, and atoms, which all qualify as genuine individuals. There are, however, certain qualities, that if an entity lacks them, then it would not be counted as a genuine individual. For example, some items, such as ceramic cups, safety pins, and pencils all lack “natural bodies” and an “evolutionary history,” and these would not be counted as genuine individuals. Rocks would be disqualified by the fact that, as an...
aggregate, they have no overarching “organizing structure.” Trees, too, would not be considered as genuine individuals, since they have structures that serve to merely “transport nutrients to their constituent cells.” A central feature, then, that distinguishes genuine individuals from aggregate individuals is in how those individuals can be organized. A rock, says Griffin, has no experience of its own, and hence no power for response to its surrounding community; rather, the highest level of experience is found in the billions of molecules that are found within it. The organization into “aggregational societies” and “compound individuals” leads Griffin to call his own position “panexperientialism with organizational duality.”

Given this, certain criteria distinguish between aggregates and genuine compound individuals. Whether this is adequate or not must be left up to the reader. But what of (1) and (3)? In order to get at (3) we will need to consider (1), which is the central question of PECP, and to which we now turn.

In Unsnarling the World Knot, Griffin makes an attempt at answering CP. He begins by giving consideration to William James’s version of CP in his Principles of Psychology. James’s argument goes as follows:

Where the elemental units are supposed to be feelings, the case is in no wise altered. Take a hundred of them, shuffle them and pack them as close together as you can (whatever that may mean); still each remains the same feeling it always was, shut in its own skin, windowless, ignorant of what the other feelings are and mean. There would be a hundred-and-first feeling there, if, when a group or series of such feelings were set up, a consciousness belonging to the group as such should emerge. And the 101st feeling would be a totally new fact; the 100 original feelings might by curious physical law, be a signal for its creation, when they came together; but they would have no substantial identity with it,

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nor it with them, and one could never deduce the one from the others, or (in any intelligible sense) say that they *evolved* it.\textsuperscript{98}

Here, Griffin suggests that James’s argument was pointed at a particular type of “compounding,” one that does not touch his own Whiteheadian-Hartshornean view of compound individuals. The intended target was a form of “pantheistic idealism,” which suggests that the emergence of the collective experience is in some way logically identical to the individuated experiences of the group. “James’s point,” suggests Griffin, “was that the more inclusive experience is a *new* experience, numerically distinct from the more limited experiences it includes.”\textsuperscript{99} Griffin continues, “James’s argument, then, counts only against the identist form of panpsychism, according to which our unified conscious experience is supposed to be strictly (numerically) identical with the much more restricted experiences of the billions of neurons in the brain.”\textsuperscript{100} Griffin would agree that such a view is unwarranted and “logically self-contradictory.”\textsuperscript{101} On the Whiteheadian/Hartshornean view, rather than saying that the many *are one*, it would be more accurate to say that the many *become one*, while also *increasing by one*. It is through his acceptance of the “subjective” and “objective” modes of the existence of each occasion that, Griffin believes, Whitehead avoids the self-contradiction. Take, for example, neuronic experiences. When such occasions occur simultaneously, in their subjective mode they are many, but in their objective mode, they are the “many becoming one.”\textsuperscript{102}


\textsuperscript{99} Griffin, *Unsnarling the World Knot*, 178.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 180.
Despite Griffin’s response, it seems that the fundamental difficulty of the Process notion of consciousness still runs up against CP, though the problem is not quite how Griffin has spelled it out; rather, the problem is one of the continual subsistence of such combinatorial states. Let us call this the “panexperientialist continual combination problem” (henceforth PECCP). To see this, it is important to briefly rehearse how Process thinkers understand God’s role in the whole ordeal.

God seeks to woo the various occasions into some directed aim, which I would take it to be how PPT would explain (3). Given that each occasion has its own level of freedom to accept or to reject God’s initial aim, then, metaphysically speaking, neither God nor anyone else can cause them to do otherwise. This, it would seem, requires quite a bit of cooperation between the various occasions as they form into societies, especially as this process has been going on since the original chaotic state. But why do these various occasions move toward societies? Why cooperate in the first place (in whatever capacity they can)? What keeps them together? Furthermore, what keeps the whole ordeal from stopping and going back on itself? Perhaps the defender of PPT will want to say that it is God who keeps the whole thing going by repeatedly sending out initial aims. Given the sheer amount of occasions within the cosmos (and, perhaps, beyond), how is it, one wonders, that God keeps up with it all (especially since God is part of the mix)? Despite God’s intimate awareness of each genuine entity (whether “simple” or “compound”) and God’s ability to send initial aims, seemingly, at instantaneous speed—all the while providing the direction of the world through each initial aim—God can do nothing about whether occasions will follow suit. There is, however, another issue. These occasions are to make less than split second decisions. The decision making of occasions are meant to simulate something similar to how people make decisions. But the way occasions make decisions are not
always how people do. When humans make decisions, it often takes time and much thought. There are instances where a person will have to make a split-second decision, but that is not always the case. Yet, that is how it is for these occasions in every instance. There seems to be something of a paradox involved, as Hasker explains:

Now even the simplest actions take more than a tenth of a second or so during which the ‘actual occasions’ are supposed to endure; furthermore, humans are capable of forming and carrying out plans over periods lasting weeks, months, or years. Clearly, the process of ‘concrescence,’ in which the occasions selects its ‘subjective aim’ and is guided thereby in the way it incorporates past experiences into the present, is modeled on the process of decision making by actual persons as it is empirically observed. Yet the frame for an actual occasion (which is never actually specified but can hardly be more than a small fraction of a second) is far too brief for any meaningful decision making to occur.\(^{103}\)

The novelty of the PPT view on consciousness does not seem to outweigh the difficulties that the defender of such a view must take with respect to God’s role in sending out such initial aims and the even bigger difficulty that the occasions must make such split-second decisions, while maintaining unity within the various genuine societies, especially those which are of greater complexity, such as the human soul. This, I take, to be the first leg of PECCP. The second leg has to do with the nature of consciousness itself as an emergent property, to which I now turn.

“Consciousness” or “mind” or “soul” for Process thinkers remains, nevertheless, an emergent feature, or, at least, a “true individual,” especially since it is grounded in prehensions of a multiplicity of prior occasions. If consciousness is a society in-and-of-itself, then the defender of PPT runs up against another problem. Moreland argues: “if an emergent property is depicted as contingently linked to the base properties causing it to emerge, then apart from an appeal to God’s contingent choice that things be so and to God’s stable intention that they

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continue to be so, there will be no explanation for the link or its constancy.”

But this applies equally to CP, as Moreland further explains:

If a *sui generis* emergent property or a new “true individual” is acknowledged and its appearance is correlated with a certain set of circumstances formed by combinatorial processes acting on myriads and myriads of subvenient entities, then apart from an appeal to God’s contingent choice that things be so and to God’s stable intention that they continue to be so, there will be no explanation—naturalistic, panpsychist, or otherwise—for its appearance or constancy.\(^{105}\)

Here, I think, is the key weakness of the panpsychist/panexperientialist view of consciousness, which is the second leg of PECCP. But it is also a key weakness of process ontology in general. There is nothing that requires or causes the various societies—aggregational or genuine—to persist. As we saw, God, according to PPT, does not do this, nor could God ever do this. It is metaphysically impossible for God to do so. It is doubtful that something else lies behind the structure. Creativity is a central feature of PPT, but it is more of a description of what is taking place within the universe at all times, rather than functioning as some kind of force (as one might see in pantheism) that controls, causes, or even sustains all things within existence.

PPT, by postulating panexperientialism is, it would seem, one-up on reductionistic materialism for explaining consciousness, since the notion of “mental” is already a metaphysical fact of the universe. It avoids the complications of naturalistic viewpoints that posit that mental properties are in some way a new and novel part of the universe. Nevertheless, such a view fails to fully explain consciousness, in part due to CP, but more specifically PECCP, the version argued for, here.

\(^{104}\) Moreland, *Consciousness*, 131.

\(^{105}\) Ibid.
Having explored life and consciousness, we now turn to the PPT view on good, evil, and freedom. Griffin suggests that there are two dimensions to something that is intrinsically evil. These two dimensions are the opposite of the two criteria for intrinsic goods. For Whitehead, claims Griffin, goodness is related to beauty, and hence the two criteria for intrinsic goodness are aesthetic in nature. The first is “harmony” and the second is “intensity.” To say that some experience is good is to say that it is both harmonious and intense. The opposite of harmony is “disharmony” or “discord.” Disharmony occurs through the clashing of elements within an experience, bringing about a “feeling of mutual destructiveness.” The opposite of intensity is “triviality,” which includes things such as boredom or lack of excitement.

At times there is tension between harmony and intensity, which may endanger one or the other. For example, when there is an increase in intensity there is also an increase in complexity. The more complex that an experience may become, the more it may upset the harmony that has already been achieved. In order to maintain harmony, it (harmony), too, must become more complex. According to Griffin, there are two ways that an experience may be considered as “complex,” both of which contribute to its intensity. The first has to do with the amount and variety of elements belonging to the experience in question. Griffin explains it as follows:

Each experience begins by appropriating data from previous experiences. For example, an occasion of human experience receives influences from its own past experiences, from its body, and from God. The act by which an occasion of experience absorbs data from other experiences is called a “feeling” or a “positive prehension.” What is excluded are some of the feelings that were combined in the previous experience.

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107 Ibid., 283.

108 Ibid.
An occasion has the ability to combine the received data either positively or negatively. A positive prehension of the data leads to the occasion accepting and accommodating it; whereas a negative prehension leads to its exclusion.\(^{109}\) Griffin continues:

To be able to appropriate the data means to be able to bring it together into effective contrasts. Some data which a more complex occasion would integrate into *contrasts* will constitute *incompatibilities* for a less complex occasion. Hence, the less complex occasion will negatively prehend feelings which a more complex occasion could have integrated into a more complex and thereby more intense harmony. Hence, the growth of complexity in his first sense means the growth in the intensity of experience.\(^{110}\)

The second kind of complexity has to do with the occasion’s ability to simplify. Once the complex occasion has sifted through the variety of data, it can then rid itself of unwanted or unnecessary data in order to integrate “a greater intensity of experience.”\(^{111}\) As we will see, complexity as a condition for intensity is a central feature of the process view of evolution.

Griffin further distinguishes between discord and triviality. Discord differs from triviality in the sense that it is “absolute” or “noncomparative,” that is to say, “it is evil in itself, apart from any comparison with that which might have been.”\(^{112}\) Triviality, on the other hand, is comparative in the sense that some experience is more “trivial” than it need have been. Whitehead (and Griffin, too, for that matter) rejects a “metaphysical” view of evil, one whereby something is considered “evil” simply by nature of it being finite.\(^{113}\) That is not exactly what the

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\(^{109}\) Ibid.

\(^{110}\) Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 284.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.

\(^{113}\) It is not at all clear, here, whether Griffin has in mind the Augustinian view of evil as *privatio boni*. If so, it should be noticed that the view given by Griffin was not Augustine’s view. Something was not considered evil because it was finite; rather, something was considered an evil if it was a lack in something that should have been present in the thing, such as the absence of sight in a human, which should be present but was not. For Augustine and those Christians who followed his thinking, here, it was never an evil for a thing to lack something that it was not supposed to have. For example, it would not be an evil for a pig to walk on all fours instead of walking upright or for a canine to be unable to fly.
adherent of PPT means when he speaks of triviality, either. It is evil not because it is trivial; rather, it is evil only relative to what it could have been. Griffin thinks that having forms of experience emerge that are more intense and more discordant is not “necessarily inconsistent with moral goodness.” Hence, the two kinds of evil—discord and triviality—cover the full range of intrinsic evil. Discord refers to the main kinds of evil that is often considered in these types of discussions: physical and mental suffering. Triviality, on the other hand, covers a kind of evil that is often overlooked—the loss of a higher experience for a lower one.

Discord and triviality are the two forms of evil that prevent maximum enjoyment. Thus to speak of a morally responsible person is to speak of a person who seeks those things that are intrinsically good. Stated negatively, such a person would avoid or prevent any unnecessary triviality or discord that she could. This requires a certain amount of freedom. Incompatibilist freedom is a central feature of Whiteheadian/Hartshornean metaphysics. Whitehead’s entire notion of “creativity” requires that every actual occasion have a certain amount of freedom. The higher the complexity the greater the freedom. Besides God, the pinnacle of freedom is displayed in those creatures with a “soul,” “mind,” or “consciousness,” namely humans.

For Process thinkers, in a real sense God is responsible for all the evil in the world, yet, God is not indictable or blameworthy of such evil. In God’s effort to lead the world to perfection out of triviality and chaos through persuasive activity, discord has appeared. Though, it should

114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 285.
116 Ibid. Interestingly, it seems that Griffin and other process thinkers are on to something important here with respect to triviality. Though somewhat different, it goes along similar lines as our discussion in chapter one on the notion of suffering brought on by a lack of flourishing, though, there are some distinctions.
117 Griffin and Cobb, Process Theology, 70.
be made clear that God is not totally responsible for the horrors that appear in the world, since creatures have a certain level of freedom for self-determination and other-determination.118

Griffin has suggested that critics have raised questions about God’s moral goodness on three levels. First, the God of PPT is morally deficient for primarily seeking goodness that is essentially aesthetic in nature. Second, the God of PPT is morally deficient since evil is overcome through God’s experience. Third, the God of PPT is morally deficient for leading the world out of chaos and, yet does not have the power to prevent discord or horrendous evils. Let us take each of these in order.119

Regarding the first level of criticism, Griffin believes that the critics of PPT have misunderstood what Whitehead meant by speaking of good and evil in primarily aesthetic terms. They assume that aesthetic goodness somehow excludes notions of “physical” and “moral” qualities. But if one were to take physical pain, for instance, there is sense in which pain represents a kind of “dis-harmony” or “discord.” With respect to moral goodness, such things as “rightness of conduct” are a kind of beauty in-and-of-themselves. The kind of beauty that God seeks, say Griffin, is one that includes moral goodness, not one that is indifferent to it.120

As for the second line of attack, it would seem that critics have again misunderstood Whitehead. Whitehead did hold that events that are intrinsically evil “are transformed or transmuted as they are received into the divine experience,” says Griffin, but “evil never loses its character of evil so that the divine experience would be . . . ‘pure bliss’” for God.121 Rather,

118 Griffin, God, Power, and Evil, 300.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., 300-301.
121 Ibid., 303.
Whitehead thought ascribing pure happiness to God was a “profanation” and, instead, believed God’s happiness always to coincide with “sympathy and tragedy.”\textsuperscript{122} When speaking of God overcoming evil through good, Whitehead meant “that God, in responding to the evil facts in the world, provides ideal aims for the next state of the world designed to overcome the evil in the world.”\textsuperscript{123}

How do defenders of PPT address the third line of attack from critics? Here, Griffin believes, critics have failed to see that discord is not the only kind of evil in the world. One must also come to terms with unnecessary triviality, which is also a kind of “genuine evil.” If God is a morally perfect being, then such a being would want to stop all genuine evil so far that it can be done. Since unnecessary triviality is a genuine evil, God could not leave things as they were in the original chaotic state. Another important consideration is that God is sympathetic toward the world. According to PPT, God is not the God of Classical theism, impassive and unconcerned with the world; rather, in bringing creation up out of the initial chaos, God is the great sympathizer sharing with creation in all of its suffering, pain, and sorrows. God suffers with us.\textsuperscript{124} “Since the world always contains a mixture of good and evil, beauty and ugliness,” says Griffin, “the divine beauty is always tragic beauty.”\textsuperscript{125} Risks for creation are also risks for God. As God stimulates the world toward greater intensity, God too risks the potential for a greater intensity of suffering.\textsuperscript{126}
So, how are we to think of the PPT view on the metaphysics of good and evil and on moral responsibility? One of the advantages of the PPT view is that it is far reaching. If PPT metaphysical and ontological perspectives on creativity and process are correct, then there is an explanation for why evil (understood in Process terms) affects all of reality, including not only human creatures, but also other areas of creation. God is at work moving all of creation out of the chaos of triviality toward greater enjoyment. Granting such metaphysical and ontological commitments, it would seem that PPT provides both explanatory power and explanatory scope for the reality of evil in the world. Though, as we have seen, there are reasons to call into question the very notions of creativity and process as the underlining principles of all reality. Besides this, there seem to three other problems with the PPT view on good, evil, and moral responsibility:

(4) The problem of redefining good and evil

(5) The problem of a limited God

(6) The problem of eschatological pay off

Let us take each one of these in order.

Regarding (4), it would seem that Process thinkers have redefined good and evil. As shown earlier, criteria for intrinsic goodness includes harmony and intensity. God’s perfect goodness is seen in the attempt to bring about the world out of triviality and chaos, through discord, into greater harmony and intensity. The PPT view stands in stark contrast to the traditional theistic view and how most everyone understands good and evil, which is in moral categories. For theists, the criteria for moral goodness is found in God’s moral nature. But as Michael Peterson suggests, the problem is that now “good” and “evil” are understood in primarily aesthetic terms, instead of moral ones. Peterson, following Stephen Fry, objects to the
Process view that divine goodness would seek to bring about greater intensity and harmony in the world. By doing so, God may break a number of moral principles along the way. As we saw, Griffin addresses such a criticism. He argues that Whitehead’s view on aesthetics includes both “physical” and “moral” aspects. In other words, aesthetic aims include moral aims. Peterson thinks that this will not do, since moral values should be seen in their own right and not subordinate to aesthetic values. If the Process view were correct, then it would seem to make our ordinary moral principles illusory and it would make it difficult to see God’s goodness in any kind of way as recognizably good. But the problem is even more difficult, as Peterson suggests:

Process thinkers hold that God’s efforts to evoke beauty in temporal experience are not simply for the finite actualities involved, but ultimately to provide appropriate data for His own unified and comprehensive experience. In the Whiteheadian scheme, then, the suffering and difficulties, as well as the pleasures and achievements, of finite beings become material for God’s aesthetic composition, i.e., for fitting inclusion in His consequent nature. But the previous question simply recurs at another level: Is it morally permissible for deity to risk evil in order to enrich its own experience?

That God uses the experiences of creatures to maximize the divine experience calls into question whether God is worthy of all worship.

How are we to understand (5)? Process thinkers recognize that their understanding is of a limited God. That God does not control all things, nor could God ever control all things, is a central feature of Process thought. Metaphysically it is impossible for God to coerce or control creatures. Furthermore, for PPT, it is impossible for God to exist apart from a world. God in this sense is not necessary, that is to say, though God may be, in some sense, everlasting, the nature


128 Ibid., 131.

129 Ibid.
of God’s existence and God’s becoming are contingent features of the world, depending on the existence of a world. It may not be this world, but there must be a world nevertheless. This, again, stands in contrast to the theistic understanding whereby God is unlimited in nature. The theistic understanding is such that God has the power to bring about a world or to refrain from creating a world. God in no way depends on a world for His existence. Moreover, theists have understood God to have the power to control all things both “actually” and “potentially.” But it is at this point of God having the power to control all things (whether actually or potentially) that Process thinkers have issues.

In his critique of the classical view of omnipotence, Griffin makes the following claim: “if the world is understood as actual, the traditional idea of what is entailed by ‘omnipotence’ involves a fallacy, and hence cannot be used as a standard by which to consider imperfect the power of God as conceived in a non-traditional way.” It is not exactly clear here what Griffin means by “actual,” but it seems that he means something like this: if the world is actual, then it is actual in the sense that it consists of entities that have self-determining freedom that is over against God. Griffin takes this as a metaphysical principle, which would require that such a state of affairs be what it is by necessity. Griffin brings up the principle on multiple occasions. But, as Stephen Davis rightly suggests, Griffin never gives us any reason for thinking that such a

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133 Take, for example, the following passage: [I]f there is an actual world, and an actual world by metaphysical necessity contains a multiplicity of beings with power, then it is impossible for any one being to have a monopoly on power. Hence, the greatest conceivable power a being can have cannot be equated with all the power.” Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 268. See also page 12.
metaphysical principle is true.\textsuperscript{134} Rather, it is simply assumed and asserted without argument throughout. Why should the theist (or anyone else for that matter) accept this principle as true? Why think that the world “contains a multiplicity of beings with power” is a metaphysical necessity? Griffin’s objection turns on the assumption of process metaphysical and ontological commitments, which traditional theists would no doubt reject. Traditional theists would want to argue that the world is contingent, even if the world were in some sense everlasting. It would still depend, logically, on God for its existence. Since the world is \textit{ipso facto} contingent, per the classical theistic view, then any power that the world has depends on God. But this does not mean that God gives no creatures power of their own to do otherwise in certain circumstances, especially if one holds to something like human libertarian freedom.\textsuperscript{135}

Griffin recognizes that Plantinga and others, in putting forth their responses to the logical problem from evil, have argued for such a view that God gives creatures a certain amount of power and freedom, but he thinks that such views simply will not do. The free-will defense has some difficulties. First, such a view opens up the possibility that God could, on occasion, violate human creaturely freedom, if He so chooses to do so in order to thwart some horrible evil. Griffin argues, “Of course, in those moments, the apparent human beings would not really be humans, if ‘humans’ are by definition free.”\textsuperscript{136} This is a non sequitur, however. One instance of a violation of a creature’s freedom does not mean that the creature would no longer have freedom in other instances. If my child was playing in the back yard and I stopped him just before stepping into a bee’s nest, it does not follow that by violating his freedom to step in that one

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Davis, “God the Mad Scientist,” 21.
\item Sourcehood theorists like Kevin Timpe argue that libertarian freedom is best explicated in terms of our being the source of our own actions, rather than the source being a causal chain that was underway before we were born. Even if this is right, though, it typically entails the requisite ability to do otherwise.
\item Griffin, \textit{God, Power, and Evil}, 271.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
place at that one particular time that he no longer has the freedom to do otherwise. After all, our
criminal systems are often designed to do exactly what Griffin thinks that God could not do by
thwarting some evil action without also changing that person’s metaphysical stature. When a
criminal has broken the law, depending on the crime, she might be thrown in prison. This type of
punishment may be given as a consequence of the use of her freedom and, perhaps, in order to
thwart other such crimes that the criminal may perform later on down the road. But the
impingement of such freedoms does not mean that she can no longer exercise her ability to
choose. She still remains, ontologically speaking, who she is, but now with just certain
limitations. In the same vein, God’s interaction does not change who or what a person is
ontologically.

Griffin gives a second objection. Could not the a-theist suggest that it would be more
preferable to bring about world with “happy beings who are just like us, except that they are
predetermined always to do right” than a “world such as ours with genuine free will but also with
all its correlative evils”? There are some problems with such an objection. First, the theist may
respond that to have creatures who are predetermined to always do the right would entail a world
in which the creatures would not be “just like us.” There would be a significant ontological
difference between those creatures and us, viz. that they do not have libertarian freedom and,

137 Ibid., 271-272.

hence, are not free in any kind of morally significant way. But even more, a theist might respond
that happiness itself may require some kind of freedom in the libertarian sense. Some naturalists
have described a human person as a meat-machine. Like a computer or some other processor, the
brain downloads information that is input into it. Computers and the like are programmed to do
certain things by the person who programs them. They are, in a sense, predetermined to perform
and operate a certain way. If the human being is similar to some computational system or the like, programmed to respond in such and such a fashion, then it is hard to see how she can be described as “happy.” After all, when I think of my computer, I might consider it to be running efficiently or that the programs are uncluttered and operating in some kind of optimal capacity. But I doubt that I would call my computer “happy.” I take it, and perhaps many other theists would as well, that without libertarian freedom, or something in this vicinity, we might think of our general overall stature as human beings as running efficiently or optimally, but it is unclear that we can call it happiness. Happiness, as understood by Aristotle, and many of a religious persuasion, does not mean pain-free living or that no suffering is involved. Quite the contrary. Some of the greatest joys of life come from or in the midst of great trials and struggles. Such an understanding of happiness that Griffin provides here is a deflationary, hedonistic understanding of happiness, which may be nothing more than pleasure. However, there are many pleasure seekers who are not happy. Happiness for finite creatures, however, requires something of risk (though not evil itself) and moral significance that can only come about if there is such a thing as genuine agency.

Griffin provides a third argument that if one limits creaturely freedom to humans, then some other principle must explain all of the evil in the “subhuman world.” He believes that all such attempts are unsatisfactory. One might extend the free-will defense and posit something like Satan and his cohorts as behind much of the evil in the natural world not directly related to human moral agency,138 but he finds such a view somewhat implausible in our day and age.

138 For defenders of such a view see Gregory A. Boyd, Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy (Downers Grove, IL, 2001); Alvin Plantinga, God, Freedom and Evil (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1974), 57-59. It should be pointed out, however, that Plantinga, in giving the Free-will defense, is not saying that such is the case that Satan and his minions are in fact behind natural evil in the world, but only that there is no logical contradiction between the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God and the existence of evil. Boyd, on the other hand, advocates that such is the case. Plantinga’s is a defense; Boyd’s a theodicy.
Though I myself find such a view limited in explanatory power and wanting, it should be noted that just because something is unfashionable by today’s standards does not make it false.

Furthermore, there are a number of responses to the problem of natural evil since before the reprinting of *God, Power, and Evil* in 2004; yet, Griffin does not interact with any of those.¹³⁹

There are other reasons, however, for rejecting the notion of a limited God. It would seem that such a God as that of PPT would not be worship-worthy. Though God may be the greatest conceivable being (in Hartshorne’s understanding of Anselm), it would seem that such a God would be quite impotent—and God according to PPT, says Stephen Davis, must be “sufficiently impotent”¹⁴⁰ in order for God not to be blameworthy of the horrendous evils in the world. “God,” continues Davis, “must be weak enough to be incapable of unilaterally preventing evil from existing.”¹⁴¹ The God of PPT can seek to persuade actual entities to do this or that, but there is no guarantee that it will ever happen. Furthermore, the kind of persuasive power that the God of PPT has is partial and in need of supplementation. Michael Peterson, following Nancy Frankenberry, suggests that “presenting to creatures purely ideal logical possibilities is a rather sterile kind of persuasive effort.”¹⁴² He continues,

[It is not clear that any notion which locates persuasive power in the subliminal, almost subconscious experience of creatures is fully adequate. The standard concept of moral persuasion denotes much more conscious and rational activity than the process concept of subconscious urges, experiential nudges, or lures for feeling. Persuasion is characteristically understood as a process of argumentation in which each party attempts to find premises


¹⁴⁰ Davis, “Is the God of Process Theology a Valid Option,” 123.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Peterson, “God and Evil,” 128.
which the other accepts and which leads to the desired conclusion. Traditionally, the
morality of persuasion has been mutual respect for the other’s rational dignity and thus not
seeking consent on less than reasonable grounds. Ironically, process thinkers, who loudly
decry the immorality of coercion, typically describes their rendition of persuasion in terms
which do not even sound remotely similar to those of classical moral persuasion.143

Peterson’s argument is on point. It is doubtful that actual entities, given the Whiteheadian notion
of “mentality,” especially in lower forms, can discern anything like a rational understanding of
what is and is not the best through the initial aims sent by God. What makes up the content of
such nudges that God gives to His creatures. Davis is surely correct in saying that we may
admire such a being for the hard work of bringing the world to the point where it is.
Nevertheless, evil runs rampant within the world and there is no guarantee that it will ever get
better. Griffin and other PPT defenders have responded that traditional theists have fallen into
the worship of omnipotence. But as Davis rightly points out, it is not that omnipotence is to be
worshiped. We might think, here, of an evil omnipotent demon, powerful as it might be, but not
be worthy of worship. Rather, omnipotence/power is only one of the criteria for saying that some
being is worship-worthy.144 There are many other qualities, as well, such as being morally
perfect or eternal, just to name a few.

Besides not being worship-worthy, it would seem that such a God would also be
 religiously inadequate. By “religiously inadequate,” we mean that the God of PPT is incapable of
answering certain kinds of petitions, such as petitions of prayer or deliverance from certain
instances of evil. Any God that cannot answer such petitions is religiously inadequate. But I
would agree, here, with Davis that there is another way to think of some being as religiously
inadequate, viz. that such a being cannot accomplish its own purposes. In other words, if God is

143 Ibid., 128-129.

to be religiously adequate, then God must be able to bring about God’s own purposes and desires. It may be, in the end, that the God of PPT will pull through but there is no guarantee, which leads us to (6).

On the PPT hypothesis, God has gotten this whole process started, but there is no ultimate assurance that God will bring about His purposes in the end. Despite all of God’s efforts to persuade, struggle for, and suffer with the creatures in this world, we are left wondering whether God has the power to ultimately succeed. It would seem that God took a great risk in creating the world. If in the end God does not accomplish His aims, then it would seem that God is still indictable for the horrendous evils in the world.¹⁴⁵ But even more damaging is that all hope of ultimate resolution is lost.

Having examined PPT and evil, we now turn to theism. How well does theism fare? To what extent does theism answer the question of evil compared to the other three worldviews?

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 130-131.
CHAPTER 5: METAPHYSICAL SYSTEMS AND EVIL PART 4

THEISM

Introduction

In the history of Western thought, perhaps the most influential worldview has been theism. Philosophers generally speak of theists in a “broad sense” and in a “narrow sense.” A theist in the broad sense of the word refers to someone who holds to the belief that some sort of divine being or reality exists; whereas, a theist in the narrow sense is someone who places emphasis on certain attributes of a divine being, such as, a being who is an “omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, supremely good being who created the world.”¹ Paul Tillich would be an example of a theist in the broad sense and Thomas Aquinas would be an example of a theist in the narrower sense. When speaking of theism in this chapter, we are going to focus more on the narrower sense of the word, especially since some might classify pantheism, deism, polytheism, or panentheism as forms of theism.²

Here, I take theism to mean that exactly one God exists who is non-physical, perfect moral goodness, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, necessary and creator of all things.³ Christian theists have often held to a variety of other attributes, such as, pure actuality, immutability, impassibility, timelessness, simplicity, and omniscience.⁴ I will not pursue these attributes, here.


unless our discussion requires such interaction, but will give further consideration to some of these in Chapter Six. In this chapter I want to stick with as bare a variant of theism (in the narrow sense) as possible, since I am not at this point arguing for one specific brand of theism.

Before moving on, it would be helpful to consider each of these definitional points in order. By saying that only one entity exists, I mean that only one God exists, excluding anything like a cosmic dualism of beings or the polytheism of ancient Greek, Roman, Egyptian, or Norse religions. This God does not have a body, nor is the world God’s body, as some pantheists and panentheists hold. Further, being a non-physical being, God is in no way constrained by the laws of physics that govern the universe.5

When theists say that God is good, they mean that God is perfectly good. God’s perfect goodness might be taken in two ways. First, we might understand God’s goodness as wholly good. By this, theists mean that goodness is such that there are no defects in God’s character or God’s actions. Taken negatively, God never does any action that could be considered as evil. That God is necessarily good is a second way that theists have understood God’s perfect goodness. This claim is stronger than the first, in that, it entails that goodness is such a part of God’s nature that it would be impossible for God to have any kind of flaw or blemish.6 In the words of Thomas Morris, “[t]o claim that God is necessarily good is to claim that he is utterly invulnerable to evil.”7

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7 Ibid. In addition to such predications, some would further suggest that God is the good, in the sense of “is of identity.” Robert Adams provides an example of this analysis in his Finite and Infinite Goods. On the assumption of divine simplicity, this could be taken to mean either that God himself is the good, or that God’s nature is, as these would amount to the same affirmation, despite their conceptual distinctness. A denial of divine simplicity might render these two formulations as more than conceptually distinct.
To say that God is omnipotent is to say that he has maximal power. This does not mean, however, that God can do just anything that He so chooses. Omnipotence is limited by certain logical restrictions. For example, God could not create a square circle or make a married bachelor. Furthermore, when considering the problem from evil, I take it that, if God grants his human creatures something like libertarian freedom, then it is not possible for God to actualize just any world that He so chooses. Alvin Plantinga defines libertarian freedom as follows:

If a person is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it; no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action, or that he won’t. It is within his power, at the time in question, to take or perform the action and within his power to refrain from it.\(^8\)

If something like libertarian freedom is true, then it is solely up to the individual to perform or refrain from some action. If God were to cause some person to do or refrain from an action, then the person would not be free in the libertarian sense. This does not mean that God is incapable of causing someone to do some action—God has the power to do so—but God, in His choosing to create free creatures, has given them certain powers of their own. Now, what God can do, with respect to power, is to create a world, but how that world turns out, if creatures are free in the libertarian sense, is partly up to the creatures. Such a world would be a weakly actualized world, as opposed to one that is strongly actualized. While it might be logically possible for God to create a world in which creatures always did that which is right, it would be logically impossible for God to cause such a world to exist, since how the world turns out is partly up to the creature. Furthermore, along the lines of God’s power, theists have held that God has maximal knowledge. There are differences of opinion among theists as to whether or not God could know the future free actions of His creatures. I take it that He can, but some theists, particularly Openness theists,
argue that it is logically impossible for God to know the future free acts of His creatures. For those theists who believe that God knows the future free actions of His creatures, they hold to something like simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge (Molinism).

When theists speak of God as eternal, they mean, minimally, that God has always existed. Some theists have taken God’s eternity to mean that God’s temporal mode of existence is timeless, that is to say, God’s temporal mode of existence is such that God has no temporal location or extension. Generally, the timelessness view goes along with a number of other theses, viz. that God is immutable, impassible, and simple. The total combination of such a view is known as eternalism.9 Other theists have held that God is omnitemporal or everlastingly eternal, that is to say, God is temporal in some sense. Such a view does not mean that God is bound by the four-dimensional space-time universe. Nor does it require God to be in some way limited by the laws of nature.10 These thinkers believe that God transcends all created time, but is, perhaps, temporal by virtue of being in a causal relationship to the universe.11 In some ways, this is an “in house” debate, which I will not take space to discuss here. I will only mention that a good argument can be made for the coherence of either position, though, not without some theological costs on either side.12

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Regarding necessity, there are two important ways that theists understand the proposition that God is necessary: *de dicto* necessity and *de re* necessity. Take, for example, the following propositions:

(7) Necessarily, God is good  
(8) Necessarily, God is omnipotent  
(9) Necessarily, God is omniscient

Each of these propositions are expressions of *de dicto* necessity. There can be no being that counts as God who does not also have such properties as omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness in each and every world in which such a being exists. Each property is a conceptual requirement for deity. We may understand *de re* necessity, on the other hand, by considering the following propositions:

(4) God is necessarily good  
(5) God is necessarily omnipotent  
(6) God is necessarily omniscient

Such propositions tell us something that is essential about the individual involved. In this case, God is essentially omnipotent, essentially omniscient, and essentially good. The Being who in fact is God has such properties in this and all possible worlds. Hence, when we say that some entity *E* has property *P* essentially, we mean that that *E* has *P* in every possible world that *E* exists. In other words, there is no possible world in which *E* exists that *E* does not also have the property *P*. Furthermore, if *E* has *P* essentially, then there are no worlds in which *E* has the complement \( \sim P \). Here, we must also distinguish essential properties from contingent properties.

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14 Ibid., 107.

15 Ibid., 106-107.

A contingent property is a property \( P \) such that an entity might have it in one world, but have its complement \( \neg P \) in another. Contingent properties are such that they do not alter the essence of the person in question. There are some possible worlds where I became a barista or a rock star instead of an academic. But becoming a rock star or a barista does not change who I am essentially. There is, however, one additional claim that theists make when speaking of God as necessary. Theists believe that any individual who is God exists in every possible world. There are no possible worlds in which God does not or could not exist. It is impossible for God not to exist. This is known as *necessary existence*.\(^{17}\)

Lastly, theists believe that God is the creator of all things. Unlike process theists, who hold to creation out of pre-existing materials, theists believe that God created all things out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), including the entirety of the four-dimensional space-time universe. By “nothing,” theists mean that no prior thing existed other than God. All created entities are contingent and dependent on God for their existence. Furthermore, theists believe that there is a clear ontological distinction between God and creation, which theists call the *Creator/creature* distinction. God is infinite and unlimited whereas creatures are finite and limited. Theists recognize that any being or power that creatures have is given to them by God, who continually upholds and sustains them in their existence. Yet, unlike deists, who hold to a radical transcendence, theists argue that God is both transcendent and immanent. God is transcendent in the sense that God, as the creator of all things, exists apart from and is not in any way dependent on His creatures for His own existence. God is immanent in the sense that He cares for the world,

intervenes through miraculous interaction, sustains it in its existence, and is religiously available to his creatures in a variety of capacities.

**Theism and Evil**

As with the other three metaphysical systems, there are four areas that test the theistic hypothesis to explaining evil: life, consciousness, the metaphysics of good and evil, and human responsibility. To each of these we now turn.

**Theism and Life**

If theism is to explain evil in the world, then it must be able to explain life. In order to explain life, theists must explain the existence of the universe. According to the theistic hypothesis, God created the entire space-time universe a finite time ago in the past. In postulating a created universe, theists avoid certain dangers seen in the three other worldviews considered thus far, namely, the brute fact that the universe has always existed. Theists do not run up against the problem of infinite regress, since the universe has a first cause for its existence who is also a necessary being. Furthermore, the finite existence of the past seems to be confirmed scientifically by the Big Bang, which suggest that the universe exploded into existence some 13.8 billion years ago from infinite density. As we saw in Chapter Two, in order to counter the conclusions from the Big Bang, some naturalists have postulated something like a multiverse, according to which the universe is just one of an infinite number of universes. I will not rehearse the complications of such a view, here. Suffice to say, even if something like the multiverse hypothesis was true, there is still the difficulty of infinite regress that a defender of such a position must consider. But even if we were to find out that, indeed, something like the
multiverse is true, there are still resources within the theistic worldview that would allow for such an option without damaging the theistic hypothesis.  

But what of the development of life in the universe? Theists have long held that God is the originator of life in the universe. Recently theists have put forth powerful arguments demonstrating the fine-tuning of the universe. Philosopher Robin Collins has suggested evidence for fine tuning comes from three areas: laws of nature, constants of nature, and initial conditions of the universe. Regarding the laws of nature, Collins argues that if certain laws or governing principles, such as that of gravity, the strong nuclear force, or the electromagnetic force, did not exist, or, at least, if they were not replaced with a similar principle that serves the same function, “complex self-reproducing material systems could not evolve.” The same goes with certain constants of physics, such as the constant of gravity, which I considered in Chapter Two, and the initial conditions of the universe. If these constants and conditions were slightly different, then the basic structure of the universe would be quite different and life as we know it would not exist. Collins provides the following helpful analogy:

Imaginatively, one could think of each instance of fine-tuning as a radio dial; unless all the dials are set exactly right, life would be impossible. Or, one could think of the initial conditions of the universe and the fundamental parameters of physics as a dart board that fills the whole galaxy, and the conditions necessary for life to exist as a small one-foot wide target: unless the dart hits the target, life would be impossible. The fact that the dials are perfectly set, or that the dart has hit the target, strongly suggests that someone set the dials or aimed the dart, for it seems enormously improbable that such a coincidence could have happened by chance.

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The fine-tuning argument, taken with other theistic arguments, such as certain versions of the cosmological argument, provide the theist with the resources needed for thinking that the universe is caused and that an intelligent mind is behind the existence of life in it. If other naturalistic hypotheses fail, as I have argued so far, then the theist is on good epistemic grounds for thinking that God designed the universe.

Granted, not everyone will accept this line of reasoning. Perhaps one objection to the theistic hypothesis from naturalists is the “Who designed God?” argument. Such an argument, popularized by Richard Dawkins in the God Delusion,\(^\text{21}\) is also found among some philosophically astute thinkers, such as J. J. C. Smart. Smart reasons: “If we postulate God in addition to the created universe we increase the complexity of our hypothesis. We have all the complexity of the universe itself, and we have in addition the at least equal complexity of God. (The designer of an artefact must be at least as complex as the designed artefact.)”\(^\text{22}\) According to this line of thinking, postulating a designer does not really solve the issue; rather it moves the apparent design of the universe back one more level. There are, at least, three lines of response the theist can give to this argument.

First, the theists might respond that postulating the designer to be more complex than the design is not, necessarily, obvious. Nevertheless, as Collins suggests, there is something intuitive about the critic’s belief, here, namely that when we see such organized complexity in the world, it generally is produced from systems that also demonstrate such complexity. Collins believes a there is a better, second response to the critic’s objection. The critic’s argument stands only if the


design argument in question claims that every instance of organized complexity in the world needs explanation and that the theist suggests that God is the ultimate explanation for such complexity in the world. But not all design arguments require this; rather, all that the design argument needs to show is that the fine-tuning of the universe be more probable given theism than naturalism. In this way, the requirements have been met, says Collins, even if it turns out that God “exhibits tremendous internal complexity.”

23 Hence, even if the theist were to grant the critic’s point that God is as least as complex as the artifact, the fine-tuning argument would still provide reason to prefer the theistic hypothesis over the naturalistic one.

Third, the critic’s challenge based on the complexity of God assumes that God is like the universe, or, at least, the individual things found within the universe, that is to say, that God at some time came into existence. But that is precisely where the critic misunderstands the theistic hypothesis. According to the variety of theism understood here, God is both eternal and necessary. Regarding God’s eternality, there was never a point when God came into existence. God was never created nor could God ever be destroyed. Furthermore, as a necessary being, there are no possible worlds in which God does not exist. God instantiates those properties that are essential to Him in every possible world. On what basis do theists believe that God is a necessary being in the sense described above? First, theists arrive at this conclusion based on “perfect being theology” (PBT). According to the medieval philosopher and theologian St. Anselm of Canterbury, God is by definition “that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.”

24 Most theists take something like Anselm’s notion of perfect being as a proper method for thinking about God. Based, then, on PBT, theists recognize that there are many things within the

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24 Anselm, Proslogium, 3.
universe that are contingent—things that are fragile, vulnerable, and tenuous in their existence; things that move in and out of existence; and things that could have been, but never exist. But there is a greater mode of existence imaginable than what we see in contingent things. We can conceive of a being of which whose existence is such that it never ceases to exist or that it never came into being “from nothing.”\textsuperscript{25} As Thomas Morris argues, such a being’s “anchorage in reality is so great that it is not even possible for the being to have failed to exit.”\textsuperscript{26} Morris continues, “[s]urely it is only this necessary existence, this firmest possible foothold in reality, which is appropriate for a maximally perfect being.”\textsuperscript{27} There is a second way that theists arrive at God’s necessary existence—from their understanding of creation. If God is conceived of as the creator of and ultimate cause for the existence of all things that are distinct from himself, then it follows that God must be conceived to exist in all possible worlds. If God does have necessary existence, as theists believe, then God is not in any sense cobbled together from various parts.

Some critics have argued against the theistic hypothesis by suggesting that evolution removes the need for a creator. Such an objection is faulty from the start. While I myself am sympathetic to something more akin to intelligent design, I do not find such an objection to hold for two reasons.

First, if it turns out that evolution is true, as most naturalists and a growing number of theists hold, there is no contradiction between evolutionary theory and the existence of God. Some theists may argue that while there is a good amount of support for evolution, it is doubtful that one can understand it in any mechanistic manner. It would be more plausible to see it as

\textsuperscript{25} Morris, \textit{Our Idea of God}, 108.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 109.
guided. Further, as we saw in Chapter Two, critics of physicalism, such as Thomas Nagel, find it implausible that something such as consciousness could come about through evolutionary processes alone. Other theists may concur with all of the scientific conclusions of evolution, and yet question whether or not it could provide any ultimate explanation. Mechanical explanations and design are not, necessarily, at odds. It may be the case, argue such theists, that evolution is the process or mechanism by which God brings about His ultimate purposes for human life.28

There is a second response that the theist may give based on the incompatibility of evolution and naturalism. Both Thomas Nagel and Alvin Plantinga have advanced such arguments. Plantinga, in Where the Conflict Really Lies, has argued that there is deep conflict between naturalism and science, and particularly between naturalism and evolution. Plantinga’s argument centers on our cognitive faculties—faculties such as memory, perception, *a priori* intuition, and sympathy—and their reliability. Theists believe that our cognitive faculties are reliable since God has made humans in His image and likeness (or something of the like). Naturalists, on the other hand, understand our cognitive faculties as a direct result of coming together by the processes of evolution and natural selection. Given the reliability of our cognitive faculties, which, asks Plantinga, seems more plausible? Evolution, it would seem, at best guarantees that we humans behave a certain way. Evolution, understood by naturalists, promotes such things as survival or reproductive success. Our cognitive faculties, however, are not geared toward producing true beliefs; rather, they are geared toward contributing to the specie’s survival.29 On this point, following non-theist Patricia Churchland, Plantinga says, “What


evolution underwrites is only (at most) that our behavior is reasonably adaptive to the circumstances in which our ancestors found themselves; hence it does not guarantee mostly true or verisimilitudinous beliefs. Our beliefs might be mostly true or verisimilitudinous. . . ; but there is no particular reason to think they would be: natural selection is interested, not in truth, but in appropriate behavior.”

Naturalistic evolution gives us reason to doubt that: (a) the purpose of our cognitive faculties is to supply humans with true beliefs and (b) that such faculties, do, indeed, supply us on most occasions with true belief. Plantinga continues by arguing that when they are not malfunctioning, we all tend to rely or our cognitive faculties. We all, naturalists and theists alike, tend to go through life assuming that such faculties are reliable and that they produce true beliefs. But why should the naturalist think this? Plantinga believes that the naturalist is “rationally obliged” to give up such an assumption, if the naturalist holds to something along the lines of our underlying neurology as being products of adaptive behavior. Plantinga explains:

And here’s the question: what reason is there for supposing that this belief content is true? There isn’t any. The neurology causes adaptive behavior and also causes or determines belief content: but there is no reason to suppose that the belief content thus determined is true. All that’s required for survival and fitness is that the neurology cause adaptive behavior; this neurology also determines belief content, but whether or not that content is true makes no difference to fitness.

The whole scientific and naturalistic program rests on the ability to know and understand the world in a rational way. But on what basis is there for thinking that the world, as we understand it, is true? Why think that we have a grasp of the basic structure of our world? Why think that the contents of our beliefs are true? Given naturalism, at best, we can be agnostic. Hence lies the

30 Ibid., 316.
31 Ibid., 316-328.
32 Ibid., 328.
conflict between naturalism and evolution. If such is the case, as Plantinga has argued, given the reliability of our cognitive faculties and their ability to lead us to true belief, evolution would seem more probable given theism than naturalism.

If, as theists argue, the universe has an ultimate cause and design behind it, and if God serves as a suitable candidate for such an ultimate cause and design, then, it would seem, there is good reason to suppose life given theism. But what of consciousness?

Theism and Consciousness

If theism is to explain evil, it must also be able to explain consciousness, given that much of the evil that we see in the world does not result merely from pain but also from suffering, which requires one’s ability to reflect on one’s pain. Theists believe that consciousness is the result of something like the Judeo-Christian view that God created humans in His image and likeness. I am not saying, here, that every theism will hold to this view; rather, that various theisms may hold to something similar to this view, especially certain Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theistic views. The imago Dei, as Christian theists call it, suggests that God has endowed His human creatures with certain capacities to perform acts, to be intentional, to have beliefs, and to be relational. In order to function in such a way, it would seem that such creatures would require something like consciousness—an ability to not only understand themselves and their environment, but also to reflect on, ponder, and respond to it in such a way that goes beyond a mere instinctual kind of response. So far, so good. It would seem that something like consciousness might be expected given theism. But the theistic view of consciousness is not without its own problems, especially when considering the mind/body problem.

As we have seen, the mind/body problem is something that each worldview must work through. This is true of theism nonetheless. With respect to human nature on the mind/body
problem, theists hold to a number of different views. Most theists fall into one of two categories: physicalism or some form of dualism. In Chapter Two I argued against physicalism. It is my contention that theistic physicalism is susceptible to some of the same dangers that naturalistic versions face. I will not revisit physicalism here. Rather, I will focus on dualism as a viable option for explaining consciousness, which is, at any rate, the more common position among theists.

When considering dualism, there is more than one variety. There is substance dualism as well as emergent dualism. Among substance dualisms, there is the Cartesian variety as well as the Thomistic sort. Cartesian dualists focus on mind as distinct from the body, which is an externally related entity that is causally related to the body. Thomistic dualism takes it that mind is a function of the soul. The soul serves as the primary integrating feature of the person, by which it has certain capacities for both biological and mental functioning. In what follows, I will not discuss each kind and variety of dualism. All that the theist needs to show is that at least one variety of dualism explains consciousness. My focus here is not to argue for one specific form of dualism; rather, I will only put forth a general argument for mind/body dualism.

What do theists mean when they speak of dualism? If theists believe that there is an ontological distinction between God and the rest of creation, then, at minimum theists are dualists of sorts. God is considered by theists to be something like an unembodied, uncreated mind or entity, without any physical body. With respect to human nature, and perhaps the natures of some animals too, dualists recognize that there is some entity that is distinct from the body or brain. Property-event dualists believe that there is a significant distinction between mental

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properties and physical properties. Mental events such as thoughts, sensations, beliefs, or desires are all distinct from brain states or events. Substance dualists take this further and recognize that what one calls the “soul,” “self,” “I,” or the “mind” is a distinct entity from the body. Substance dualists, suggest J. P. Moreland and Scott Rae, are committed at minimum “to the claim that the soul is an immaterial entity that could, in principle, survive death and ground personal identity in the afterlife.” There is, yet, one more important distinction that substance dualists make—a distinction between functional holism and ontological holism. Functional holism recognizes (1) that the soul is in some sense in the body; (2) that the body and soul function as a unity that is both complex and deeply integrated; and (3) that the soul can exist without the body and survive death. Functional holism can work with either Cartesian or Thomistic dualisms. Ontological holism, on the other hand, suggests that the body and soul are so tightly integrated that the soul depends on the body, and when it dies, so, too, does the soul. Disembodiment is impossible. In this case, ontological holism is consistent with property-event dualism, but not with Cartesian or Thomistic versions. I take it something like functional holism to be the case, as I will argue below.

What evidence, then, is there for thinking that something like dualism is true? There are, at least, three lines of evidence for thinking that dualism is true: (1) the paradigm-case argument; (2) NDE’s and Post-death visions argument; and (3) the unity-of-consciousness argument. Let us take each one of these arguments in order.

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34 Ibid., 20.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 21.
In their book, *Body and Soul*, J. P. Moreland and Scott Rae introduce what I will call the *Paradigm-Case Argument*. According to this argument, God and, perhaps, angels are paradigm-case persons. Their argument goes as follows:

If God and, perhaps, angels are paradigm-case persons and since they are immaterial spirits, then it is at least consistent that something be both a person and an immaterial spirit. But more than this, if the paradigm-case persons are immaterial spirits, then this provides justification for the claim that anything is a person if and only if it bears a relevant similarity to the paradigm cases. Arguably, the relevant similarity between other (kinds of) persons and the paradigm cases is grounded in something all persons have in common and that constitutes that which makes the paradigm cases to be persons in the first place, namely, personhood. Personhood is constituted by a set of ultimate capacities of thought, belief, sensation, emotion, volition, desire, intentionality and so forth.  

What benefit is there to such an argument? It at least shows that the concept of an unembodied soul is not unreasonable given theism. After all, the chief exemplar of such a notion of person is God, whom theists believe to be something like an unembodied mind. But such a view is not without its critics. Some theistic physicalists will want to argue that personhood is not so much a nature as it is a function of a complex organism realized by the individual. The defender of dualism will answer such a charge by arguing that God is often understood as thinking, feeling, acting, and the like, and that such are descriptions of attributes of God and not some functional states that are in some way external to Him. But there is a second reply. As Moreland and Rae put it, “if various mental states are really functional states whose description is neutral to whether the entity realizing that state is a spirit or a brain, then just exactly what is the content of ‘spirit’ when we say that God is a spirit?”  

This seems to be an issue that theistic physicalists will have difficulty answering if they are adamant about functionalism.

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37 Ibid., 25.
38 Ibid., 26.
The second line of evidence for dualism comes from the overwhelming data on near-death experiences (NDEs) and post-death visions.\textsuperscript{39} For now, I will only be able to cover, briefly, NDEs, though there are some compelling data on post-death visions.\textsuperscript{40}

People reporting near-death experiences (NDEs henceforth) generally provide several similar experiences, such as leaving, floating above, and seeing their lifeless bodies. Such experiences are called out of body experiences (OBE). Others claim to have been met by an angel or some other kind of heavenly being, to have encountered a barrier of sorts or a bright light, or to have met deceased loved ones.\textsuperscript{41} While not the norm, there have also been some “hellish” cases.\textsuperscript{42}

Many NDE reports, while they may be true for all we know (and thus epistemically possible), are not the kinds of experiences that can be empirically verified, and thus provide little or no import as to an explanation for or reasons to believe that there is such a thing as a soul or an afterlife. After all, as some skeptics claim, many who report NDEs generally interpret their experiences in such a way as to fit their specific cultural and religious biases, for example, Christians claim to have met Jesus or an angel while Hindus report seeing their deities, and so

\textsuperscript{39} I came across the term “post-death visions” from Gary Habermas through personal correspondence.


\textsuperscript{41} For a description of such events, see Raymond A. Moody Jr., \textit{Life After Life} (Harrisburg, PA: StackPole Books, 1976), 19-103.

on. According to one critic, Michael Marsh, NDE researchers need to be more critical of reports given that “NDE accounts are non-identical, non-uniform, and hence personally idiosyncratic.” Other skeptics claim that such experiences are nothing more than the firings of synapses in the brain gone wrong or that the persons having said experiences are, in reality, hallucinating.

While the majority are non-evidential, there are a number of such accounts that are veridical and provide empirical evidence for the existence of the soul and an afterlife. But what kind of evidence counts? According to Terence Nichols, there are four lines of evidence that NDE researches put forth: (1) people are capable of describing events that they could not have known beforehand or otherwise; (2) meeting dead loved ones or people not previously known to have died; (3) change in life perspective; and (4) a vast amount of testimony that transcends gender, age, class, and ethnicity, all of which goes beyond that which can be explained by materialist explanations. For our purposes, I will only examine the first kind of evidence.

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45 Skeptic Michael Shermer argues that new evidence supports the belief that NDE’s are nothing more than a product of our brains. According to Shermer, neurologist Michael Persinger of Laurentian University in Sudbury, Canada, can induce NDE’s by subjecting a person’s temporal lobes to varying patterns of magnetic fields. Having subjected himself to Persinger’s tests, Shermer claims to have had “a mild out-of-body experience.” Michael Shermer, “The Great Afterlife Debate: Michael Shermer v. Deepak Chopra,” *Skeptic* 13, no. 4 (2008): 53. See also Peterson et al. *Reasons and Religious Belief*, 231.

46 Terrance Nichols, *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 110.

With respect to the first type of evidence, a variety of collaborative accounts can be adduced.\textsuperscript{48} Cardiologist Pim van Lommel provides a veridical account of a man in his forties, who, when he arrived at the hospital, was comatose. The coronary-care-unit nurse on duty reported taking the man’s dentures out of his mouth and placing them on a ‘crash car’ in order to “intubate” the patient. Upon seeing the nurse a week later, the man responded to her, “Oh, that nurse knows where my dentures are.”\textsuperscript{49} He proceeded to tell her, “Yes, you were there when I was brought into the hospital and you took my dentures out of my mouth and put them onto the car, it had all these bottles on it and there was this sliding drawer underneath and there you put my teeth.”\textsuperscript{50} From the nurse’s perspective, she “remembered this happening while the man was in deep coma and in the process of CPR.”\textsuperscript{51} After questioning the man further, she reported, “it appeared the man had seen himself lying in the bed, that he had perceived from above how nurses and doctors had been busy with CPR. He was also able to describe correctly and in detail the small room in which he had been resuscitated as well as the appearance of those present like myself.”\textsuperscript{52}

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\textsuperscript{48} Bruce Greyson, “Near-Death Experiences and Spirituality,” Zygon 41, no. 2 (June 2006): 393-414. There have also been cases where people who were born blind have had NDEs and were able to explain visual phenomena that would otherwise be impossible for those who have never had visual experiences before. See Jeffrey Long and Paul Perry, \textit{Evidence of the Afterlife} (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 85. \\
\textsuperscript{49} For a variety of cases and extended discussion, see Gary R. Habermas and J. P. Moreland, \textit{Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality} (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 2004), 155-172. See also Moody, \textit{Life after Life}, 94-95. \\
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. 
\end{flushright}
One NDE that was significantly evidential involves a woman named Pam, who had a brain aneurysm, and who had to have two extraordinary medical procedures back-to-back. During the second procedure, nicknamed “standstill,” her body was cooled to 60 degrees and the blood was drained from her head. At this time, her heart was stopped and she had no brain waves. According to cardiologist Michael Sabom, three clinical tests are administered to determine whether a person experiences brain death. He explains that, “her electroencephalogram was silent, her brain-stem response was absent, and no blood flowed through her brain.” Pam had met all three criteria. Sabom, who lays out the medical procedure in detail, reports that Pam, claiming to have had an out of body experience, was able to describe the events of her operation providing specific details, such as the odd shape of the bone saw used on her head and certain conversations had by the medical team. Her descriptions were then corroborated by the medical records from the operation. One interesting aspect of Pam’s story is that, while she was not brain-dead at the time of her OBE (though she would be during the second procedure, during which she continued with her NDE), it seems implausible that she could see or hear anything, since her eyes were taped shut and her ears had speakers in them giving clicking sounds, which measured her brainstem activity.

The cases given here only scratch the surface of the many NDEs reported throughout the world. But some question as to whether these NDEs really do occur or whether there is some

53 Sabom, *Light and Death*, 37.
54 Ibid., 49.
55 Ibid., 37-47.
naturalistic explanation for NDE phenomena. Though critics have put forth a number of naturalistic explanations, two are prominent: hallucinations and anoxia. Problems attend each of these. Regarding hallucinations, there are some reported cases of people who have had NDEs and who have also experienced drug-induced hallucinations. In such cases, though, serious differences obtained between the two accounts. Further, those who have had hallucinations report that after the fact it was clear that they were experiencing hallucinations. That is not the case with NDEs. Generally, unlike hallucinations, the NDEs are ordered and reality is not distorted, as is often the case with hallucinations. One other significant fact is that when people experience hallucinations, there is no overall life change. But the opposite is the case with respect to NDEs. Those who have had an NDE generally report a life change and a significant change in their beliefs and spirituality. But the real difficulty with claiming that NDEs are hallucinations is that hallucinations do not account for those parts of the NDE that can be verified empirically, such as those considered in the two cases mentioned above. But what about anoxia?

Anoxia is a condition that happens when the brain is starved of oxygen, a condition often seen in fighter pilots and mountain climbers. Those who experience anoxia often experience confusion and distortion in their mental processes. The problem with chalking NDEs up to certain physiological explanations, such as anoxia, is that in many of the anoxia cases there is no coherence to a person’s thoughts. But that is not what we see with respect to NDEs. Often NDE experiences are crisp and clear, containing vivid details of all that was experienced. The British neuropsychiatrist, Peter Fenwick, has this to say about NDEs and anoxia:

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57 For a response to various naturalistic hypotheses see Glynn, *God: The Evidence*, 120-128.

58 Ibid., 123-124.
As the brain becomes anoxic it ceases to function. It becomes disrupted and disorganized, so that you become gradually confused, disoriented, your perception fragments and finally you become unconscious. You do not think clearly, you don’t have insights, you don’t have clear, coherent visions. . . . If anoxia is to be the major cause of NDEs we have to postulate a series of very unlikely events. The brain has to be able to synthesize a complex internal world and to be able to remember it, despite a lack of oxygen which is so profound that brain function is widely disrupted so that consciousness is lost. 59

Lastly, as with hallucinations, anoxia does not account for the kind of veridical experiences shown above.

If acceptable, then, certain phenomena such as NDEs and post-death visions provide veridical evidence not only for the existence of something like the soul, which exists apart from the body, but also for an afterlife. Here, we would concur with philosopher Andrew J. Dell’Olio, when speaking of the empirical nature of near-death experiences, “naturalistic materialists, if they are to be true to their empiricist heritage, must . . . take seriously the phenomenology of experience and its impact on the formation and justification of belief.” 60 Having examined such empirical arguments, now we shall turn to our third and last argument for the soul—the unity-of-consciousness argument.

Something like the unity-of-consciousness argument was first put forth by Leibniz, but a modern defender of such an argument is William Hasker. 61 Hasker’s own view on the mind/body problem is called “emergent dualism.” Whether Hasker’s emergent dualism fails or succeeds is


60 Andrew J. Dell’Olio, “Do Near-Death Experiences Provide a Rational Basis for Belief in Life After Death?,” *Sophia* 10 (2010): 115.

up for grabs, but the unity-of-consciousness argument is a powerful argument against the
physicalist view on consciousness.

The chief difficulty that the materialist or physicalist must face is twofold. On the one
hand, the problem lies in the complexity of the physical equipment, that is to say, the brain to
physicalism seems to be something like a machine, computer, or the sort, made up of a variety of
distinct parts. Yet, on the other hand, it is not at all clear how a unified complex conscious
experience can be distributed to any one location of the brain or to be distributed among all of
the various parts of such a complex entity. Here, Hasker argues, if we were to take an aspect of
our conscious experience, say, our visual field, the information that it yields cannot be contained
in something like one single transistor or neuron. Here, the materialist may want to suggest that
such a state is broken up into various parts of the brain. Suppose this is the case. The question
still remains: “who or what is aware of the conscious state as a whole?”62 Hasker believes that
the answer to such a question is obvious: it is the person who is aware of her “conscious state, at
any given moment, as a unitary whole.”63 But this leads to a second question for the materialist:
“When I am aware of a complex conscious state, what physical entity is it that is aware of the
state?”64 Hasker believes that the materialist cannot provide a plausible answer.

The unity-of-consciousness argument, formally stated, is as follows:

1. I am aware of my present visual field as a unity; in other words, the various components
   of the field are experienced by a single subject simultaneously.

2. Only something that functions as a whole rather than a system of parts could experience a
   visual field as unity.

63 Ibid., 182.
64 Ibid.
3. Therefore, the subject functions as a whole rather than a system of parts.

4. The brain and nervous system, and the entire body, is nothing more than a collection of physical parts organized in a certain way. (In other words, holism is false.)

5. Therefore, the brain and nervous system cannot function as a whole; it must function as a system of parts.

6. Therefore the subject is not the brain and nervous system (or the body, etc.).

7. If the subject is not the brain and nervous system then it is (or contains as a proper part) a non-physical mind or ‘soul’; that is, a mind that is not ontologically reducible to the sorts of entities studied in the physical sciences. Such a mind, even if it is extended in space, could function as a whole rather than as a system of parts and so could be aware of my present visual field as a unity.

8. Therefore, the subject is a soul, or contains a soul as a part of itself.65

The argument is sound, and I would agree with Hasker that if the materialist were to deny any of the premises, setting aside the notion of the soul in 7, it would be step 4. Hasker believes that the materialist, by denying 4, is forced to accept something like holism—but such is not without its own difficulties.

One potential objection to the unity-of-conscious argument comes from reflection on neurological disunity brought about by commissurotomy and multiple personality disorder. Commissurotomy was once a procedure performed on people who suffered from severe forms of epilepsy, whereby the thick network of connective nerve tissue between the right and left hemispheres of the brain was severed. While such a procedure proved to help with the symptoms of severe cases of epilepsy, it also caused the patients who had the procedure to have a breakdown in communication between the two hemispheres of the brain. At times, it seems as though each hemisphere of the brain was doing its own thing apart from the other, especially when the subject was asked to do a unique or novel task. But, perhaps, more damaging to the

65 Ibid., 182.
notion of a single-unified consciousness are from multiple personality disorder cases. Those who suffer from multiple personality disorder often display what seem to be two distinct conscious personalities, with memories and beliefs of their own.\textsuperscript{66} Would such cases, then, count against Hasker’s argument? It would seem not. Hasker’s argument is more modest in nature. All that he is arguing for is that (1) the various parts of the brain, brain stem, etc. cannot account for the unitary experience of consciousness; and (2) the kind of unity in question is a “modest” kind of unity, “consisting merely in the fact that one has at a given moment a phenomenal field (visual and/or auditory and/or tactual and/or . . .) which comprises a large amount and variety of data.”\textsuperscript{67}

If the above arguments are successful, then it would seem that we have good reason to think that there is something like the soul. If we have a soul, and having a soul is deeply consistent with theism (which seems to be the case), then it would seem that we have good reasons for thinking that theism succeeds in explaining consciousness. But what of our last two categories, the metaphysics of good and evil and human responsibility?

Theism, Good, Evil, and Responsibility

How surprising is evil given theism? As the reader will recall, there are two basic kinds of evil, moral evil and natural evil. I will consider each below, along with some attention to the nature of gratuitous evil.

Moral evil does not at all seem surprising given theism, especially if God has brought about human creatures who have the capacity to freely perform certain actions. As C. Stephen Layman rightly notes, the ability to love God and neighbor freely, as opposed to some automaton, which is programmed always to do the right thing, is a much higher good. If such

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 176-182.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 183.
choices were not up to the agent, then they would seem emptied of all significance. Therefore, we would expect God, if He were a morally perfect being, to create creatures with such a capacity to choose to love or to do otherwise. Furthermore, on theism, we would expect God to create human creatures with certain desires and the ability to reason and the sort, much like, as noted earlier, we see in the imago Dei. Many of the moral evils that occur in the world result from an agent’s wrongly desiring certain things. Layman provides several examples of this. There is nothing bad per se in a person desiring to eat food for nourishment and enjoyment; however, the evil may come about when the person desires to hoard all of the food keeping others from having what they need for nourishment. Again, the desire to control others is not always a bad thing. We want leaders who are capable of leading us in the right way, and sometimes that may require a certain amount of control, but the desire to control others when it is not best for the common good or the individuals controlled can also happen, and too often does.68

Now a skeptic might respond by asking whether there might not be instances of wrongdoing without any kind of suffering—such as a person hoarding all the scarce food and God supplying more food so that those in need do not go hungry. Layman thinks that such is logically possible, but I would agree with him that the significance of our choices is intricately connected and organically to the consequences that ensue. On this point he argues:

If we can never benefit or harm others (or reasonably expect to do so), then we haven’t been given a significant degree of freedom or responsibility. Furthermore, if our actions never caused harm and suffering, we would surely fail to understand the seriousness of evil. Now, it might be replied that my choices will be significant provided I believe I can benefit or harm, even if the basis is false. And I will surely be apt to see the evil I do as egregious if I believe it causes others to suffer, even if it really doesn’t cause any suffering at all. However, if we believe we can benefit and harm others, when in fact we cannot, then we are systematically deceived about something extremely important and fundamental to our lives,

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and such massive deception would itself be an evil; hence it is plausible to suppose that a perfectly good God would not set up a world involving such deception.\(^{69}\)

Deception is often thought of as a kind of moral evil in itself. If God were morally perfect and good, then to set up a world with such mass deception would itself be a great evil. God, in turn, would participate in evil. If God is morally perfect, as theists believe, He could not bring about such a world.

How are theists to respond to the total amount of moral evil and wrongdoing in the world? One way of responding is by way of skeptical theism.\(^{70}\) Skeptical theists argue that there are no so-called gratuitous (unnecessary) evils in the world. Given our limited cognitive faculties, it is impossible to know what reasons God might have for allowing certain evils in the world. Here I would agree with a number of other theists that it would be unwise to think that every form of evil has a corresponding greater good that is to come about as a result of God’s allowing them.\(^{71}\) Again, I think Layman’s insight is correct in thinking that the moral harms and

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\(^{69}\) Ibid., 11.


1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

2. An omniscient, wholly good beings would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being. (p. 2)

Rowe’s argument is a powerful one. Alston and Wykstra, along with a number of other skeptical theists, argue that it is impossible for us to know, given our finite natures and limited cognitive faculties, the reasons that God might have for allowing certain seemingly gratuitous evils. I will not be able to address Rowe’s argument in this chapter. But given that I allow for the possibility of gratuitous evils, as will be argued, thereby rejecting Rowe’s (2), it would seem that Rowe’s argument loses its bite. For the full version of Rowe’s argument see “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1-11.

suffering that we humans can inflict is connected intricately to the significance of our choices. He thinks that it is better to consider such instantiations of wickedness as “collateral effects.” He suggests that they are “consequences of divine creative activity rather than necessary means to divine ends.”

One of the chief reasons that theists gravitate toward greater-good type arguments generally has to do with a certain understanding of God’s sovereignty. They take it that if such things as gratuitous evils exist, then God is in some sense not sovereign or in control. According to such an understanding of sovereignty, everything that occurs must have a purpose, including evil. But the question theists must ask centers on whether such an understanding of God’s sovereignty is required or is the best understanding. Must God cause, or at least, allow such evils in the world in order to bring about corresponding greater goods? I think not. The problem with such an understanding leads to a concept of God that is consequentialist in nature when dealing with his creatures. Bruce Little brings this point out clearly:

Does it necessarily mean that if something happens on this earth without a divine purpose, this somehow strikes at the truth of God’s sovereignty? It seems to me that the answer is No; to maintain otherwise leads to questionable ends. For example, say a person commits adultery; is it gratuitous evil or is it an evil that God in His sovereignty planned? The plan would have had to be from before creation or at the moment of creation. The end is that God planned for a person to commit adultery, the very thing that God says is sin. God becomes the author of sin. Furthermore, the adultery was planned to bring about a good (under the G-G theodicy), so now sin brings about good and it could be argued that more sin would bring about more good.

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73 Little, *God, Why This Evil?*, 62.
In a similar vein, Kirk MacGregor argues that theists who hold to greater-good type arguments are faced with a dilemma. Either evil is necessary in order for God to bring about some greater-good, or it is morally unnecessary. To claim the former goes against divine omnibenevolence, that is to say, to claim that evil is necessary in order for God to bring about greater goods is to say that “God operates according to the principle that the ends justify the means,” which, again, goes against a concept of God who is morally perfect and essentially good. But greater-good responses, says MacGregor, would also count against divine omnipotence. It would seem that such an acceptance would lead to the unwanted result that if there are certain goods that can only come about through God’s allowance of evils, then there would exist certain “logically possible tasks that God could not perform—namely, bringing about various goods in the absence of evils.” Such an argument, believes MacGregor, leads to an indirect argument for gratuitous evils.

But there is, I take it, another reason for thinking that something like gratuitous evils exist given significant moral freedom—that God wants for his human creatures to be morally responsible beings. William Hasker calls this the “principle of divine moral intention,” which he states as follows:

It is an extremely important part of God’s intention for human persons that they should place a high priority on fulfilling moral obligations and should assume major responsibility for the welfare of their fellow humans.

Such a principle, argues Hasker, stands in contradistinction to the idea of God permitting certain evils in order to bring about some greater good or to prevent some greater evil. To think that God

75 Ibid.
is running the world in such a way as to allow certain evils in order to bring about a greater good results in another principle he calls the “offsetting good principle.” The principle is stated as follows:

Any harm resulting from a morally wrong action will be offset by a “greater good” that God could not have obtained without permitting the evil in question.\textsuperscript{77}

Hasker believes that if things are really like what the second principle entails, then it would have a serious effect on our motivation to live morally good lives and to take responsibility for the wellbeing of others. But more than moral motivation, it would seem that there is a sense in which the two principles are contradictory. Take the following argument:

(1) If God prevents all evils that He could without thereby losing some greater good or by bringing about some greater evil, then no gratuitous evils exist.

(2) God commands humans to thwart evil.

(3) If God commands humans to thwart evil, and if no gratuitous evils exist, then God commands humans to thwart those evils which are necessary for bringing about some greater good or for preventing some greater evil.

(4) If God commands humans to thwart evils that are necessary for bringing about some greater good or stopping some greater evil, then God is requiring humans to do something that works against the maximal good.

(5) To require humans to work against that which brings about maximal good is logically impossible for a morally perfect being to do.

(6) Therefore, there exists gratuitous evils.\textsuperscript{78}

It seems that God’s command to thwart evil runs up against His work in bringing about the maximal good. Our actions really matter and there is a steep responsibility for humans to care for one another. Perhaps, it would be in the theist’s interest to give up such greater-good type

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 192.

\textsuperscript{78} This argument is an adaptation of Kirk MacGregor’s argument in “The Existence and Irrelevance,” 172.
arguments and rather to recognize that such evils are a part of a world in which humans are given significant moral responsibility and freedom.

Another possible response by the skeptic is to suggest we could still have as much meaning and significance in the world that we do without also having certain types of evils, such as genocide or rape. There is no doubt that there are certain evils, such as the holocaust, that the world would have been better without (an admission that, by some definitions, again affirms there are gratuitous evils). But the problem with such objections as this one is that if there were no evils such as genocide or rape, then the critic might always find other evils, such as murder, that might come under scrutiny. And when murder is in question, the critic may propose another evil, and this could go on *ad infinitum*. But as Layman suggests, it may be that some people will be perfectly satisfied with a world in which the consequences of our actions would be trivial. Such a world, though it might have its attractions for having fewer risks, would, nevertheless, “pale in significance to the world we find ourselves in,” says Layman. Nevertheless, such a world does not seem surprising given theism, at least not on serious and sober reflection. Though our world, as it is, contains many risks, it also contains an abundance of meaning. Our actions really do count. Furthermore, when we demand a world other than the one that has obtained, we are, perhaps unwittingly, wishing for a world with much less significance as our current world now possesses.

In addition to the amount and kinds of moral evils in the world, at least two additional issues merit consideration: (1) what is the basis of morality; and (2) how are theists to understand God’s commands? Let us begin with the grounding of morality. What, then, is the basis for good

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80 Ibid.
and evil according to theism? Many theists believe that God not only does that which is good and that He always acts justly, but that God is, in God’s very nature, something akin to the Platonic notion of “the Good.” God in the theistic sense, however, differs in two quite different ways. God is, as Robert Adams suggests, “a concrete individual.” God is essentially a person or essentially personal in some significant way. Second, God, as the Good, is not some abstract object; rather, He is a “real being.” When theists say that God is “the Good,” they do not mean that God, by being the Good, encompasses just anything that a person takes in common language as “good.” Rather, as Adams emphasizes throughout *Finite and Infinite Goods*, he couches the notion of good in terms of something more along the lines of *excellence*. It is God Himself as the Good that grounds any finite goods that might exist in the world. God, then, is neither dependent on or looks to anything other than Himself with respect to perfect moral goodness. God Himself becomes the measure for any commands that He issues. Thus when God issues

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81 Not all theists are theistic Platonists; nevertheless, there is overlap between theistic Platonists and other theists in their analysis of moral goodness, namely in the sense that both root it in God. Take, for example, C. Stephen Evans who is a natural law theist. He recognizes that non-theists can have a good idea of moral obligation (epistemologically), yet, moral obligations are ontologically dependent upon God. C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21.


83 Ibid.

84 Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14. When speaking of God as the Good, Adams point is not merely that the Good depends on God; rather, God is the Good, thus endorsing something akin to an identity relation between God and goodness. This is not something that he merely asserts; rather, he offers a principled argument by appealing to value theory. Plato scholars often differ over whether or not the Forms are best understood as universals or as exemplars. Adams opts for the latter. Desires, too, play a central role in Adam’s theory, as Baggett and Walls explain: “The role of our desires . . . is to fix the reference of our value terminology to a property or object that has its own nature independent of our desires.” [David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 94]. They continue: “if there is indeed a single best candidate for the role of the Good itself, or the property of goodness,” then it is reasonable for one infer it as the likely essence of goodness. Lastly, for Adams, “whatever best fills the role of Goodness is an object of admiration, desire, and recognition, at least commonly and to some degree” (p. 94). Without rehearsing the entirety of his discourse, Adams’s argument boils down to God as the most plausible candidate for filling this role. For their full summary, see Baggett and Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*, 93-95.
commands, those commands are not arbitrary, but have ramifications for flourishing and wellbeing among His human creatures. This does not mean, however, that the commands that God issues are always for everyone in all times and in all places. It may be that God issues certain commands that are contextually oriented, that is to say, God issues certain commands that are geared toward a specific group for a specific time in history, but which are, nevertheless, in accordance with His divine purposes. These commands would not, however, be arbitrary, so as long as they are grounded in God’s own moral goodness and are meant for the flourishing of those with whom God gives the command.

Lastly, what about natural evil? Natural evil, I take it, provides the more difficult problem for theists. Not only must theism answer the question of devastation caused by things such as natural disasters or disease, but they must also answer the question of animal pain and suffering.

Before responding to the question of natural evil, it would be helpful to consider some important distinctions. First, it is important to recognize that not everything that appears to be natural evil can rightly be labeled as such. There are many evils that, although they do appear in nature, are, nevertheless, at least a partial result of human doing. Flooding caused by the breaking of dams, damage to the ozone layer and natural habitats due to pollution and human waste, animal death through the changing or destruction of natural habitats, damage to land and animals caused by nuclear explosions and other forms of war, famine caused by the overuse of land, extinction or near-extinction of animals due to poaching, and acid rain due to air pollutants are just some of the kinds of evil that appear in nature, but that, in reality, are a result of human destructive tendencies.

Second, there are other items that must also be taken into consideration, such as human ignorance, neglect, and the choice of risk. Often humans move into areas of the world that are
prone to natural disasters, such as hurricanes, tornados, and the like. For many of these people, the goods that come from living in such an area outweigh the potential for harm caused by such natural disasters. There have also been reports of people refusing to evacuate a city even knowing that something like a hurricane is coming. It is also understood that sometimes people are ignorant of upcoming natural events, such as tsunamis, that cause vast amounts of destruction. But even in such instances, there may be an element of human responsibility. In the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that killed over 250,000 people, there was no tsunami detection system in place, even though the technology had been around for some time. Having such a mechanism in place could have saved thousands of lives.\(^8\) The point here is not to make light of the tragedy that comes with such disasters, but only to point out that living in such areas that have an elevated risk factor or refusing to evacuate despite the risk of an impending destruction or the failure to implement strategies for protection despite the capacity to do so are all matters that involve human choice. Our choices are significant and often carry with them certain risks. Making this point does not entail that all evils occurring in nature are a result of human choice; rather, the point is only that some are connected to moral action and choice.

Third, it should be noted that some diseases, which are thought to be forms of natural evil, are either caused by humans or are perpetuated by humans. Some diseases are brought about through neglect of taking care of one’s body. Lack of exercising or lack of control in eating certain things can often lead to disastrous effects on the body, such as heart disease or diabetes. Active use of certain drugs can also cause the body’s organs to shut down or to cause certain cancers. Having multiple sexual partners may lead to certain sexually transmitted

diseases. Sometimes hospitals, which are to be places of healing, may transmit certain diseases through acts like blood transfusions, when the blood has not been properly screened. Pollutants in the water or in the ground where we grow our foods may result in ill effects on the body. Again, not to make light of these tragedies in the world, but many of these, again, show that there is a significance to our actions and choices. Further, this is not to say that all diseases are in some way related to human freedom; rather, it is only to point out that some are.

Having said that, it is not at all surprising on theism that God would create such a world as ours. If God exists, then it would seem that He would have good reasons for creating, not only human life, but also nonhuman life, such as found in the great diversity of plants and animals in the world, reflecting His fecundity. But such a world, is the kind of world where we also find a great amount of natural evil, particularly evils brought about through natural disasters, predation, disease, and the like. How might the theist explain this?

First, it may be helpful to consider that many of the events that bring about great destruction are also the same kinds of events that are necessary for the normal operations of our world and that, often, bring about some of the greatest wonders. Take, for example, plate tectonics crashing together. These are often the cause of such events as earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes. Yet, without plate tectonics, we would not have the beautiful mountain ranges or tropical islands that we see. But the importance of plate tectonics goes beyond aesthetic reasons. The earth’s climate is remarkably stable, and this is due, in part, to plate tectonics, which, through volcanoes, cycle out CO₂ into the atmosphere. The release of CO₂ through volcanic activity is important for warming the earth’s atmosphere and for the water cycle. Moreover, plate tectonics are involved in producing the biodiversity on the earth, which allows complex life to
flourish. Without the effects brought about through plate tectonics, while there may be life, there could be no human life as we know it.\textsuperscript{86}

Second, I am going to suggest something that goes against the intuition of many who discuss the problem of evil—\textit{not all pain amounts to evil}. It may be that certain kinds of pain are similar to plate tectonics, in the sense that, without them, our physical bodies would not function properly and flourish as they do. If pain is an important part of proper function, then pain itself may be seen as a good, in the sense that it is better to have certain pains than not to have them. As discussed in Chapter One, there are many great advantages to having pain. When we consider those people suffering from Hansen’s disease (leprosy), many of the complications that plague their bodies stem from an inability to feel physical pain. Without pain they do not have the same advantage that I do of feeling certain pains. If I am out walking in the yard and contort my leg in such a way that I sprain my ankle, my body’s response is to swell in the area and the result is that I feel pain. Pain, in this instance, is like a warning system telling my body that something is not quite right. The pain that I feel may be a discomfort (given that we all have different tolerances of the pain that we feel, it may be a big discomfort), but even here the pain itself is not the problem, as much as one of my body parts has been injured and is not functioning properly. Pain is the consequence of the sprained ankle. Moreover, as noted in Chapter One, people will often put themselves through great pains in order to accomplish goals. Some of the cases considered are athletes who put themselves through great pains to become better or women who choose to experience child birth naturally apart from any epidurals or pain medicine. Yet we do not generally classify such pains as evils, especially when they were endured willingly. So, at least to

me, it seems that the hedonistic principle that all pain is evil is wrong. But someone might object, “What about mental pain?” Even with respect to mental pains, it does not seem to me that we ought to classify all such pains as evil. Perhaps, like physical pain, mental pain, too, functions like a warning system telling us that something is not quite right. For example, suppose I see some heinous act carried out and my immediate response is one of anger and sorrow. At the same time, I feel a great amount of mental pain for the person because of what I saw. If our emotions are in any way connected to our beliefs, then perhaps the pain itself is a way of telling me that something is not quite right. Yet again, there are many individuals who would endure a great amount of mental pain, brought about by ridicule, mental abuse, psychological torture and the like, in order to hold unswervingly to some conviction or to accomplish some task. Here we might think of a P.O.W, who, despite both physical and mental torture, endures a great amount of mental pain for the sake of defending her country. Or, again, we might think of an athlete who willingly takes certain forms of ridicule and embarrassment from a coach or peers in order to achieve the goal of winning or becoming the best that he can be. In each case, the person may be in quite a bit of mental pain, but nevertheless shows resilience and fortitude. Now, to be clear, that is not to say that there is no evil involved in what is going on in either case; rather, the point is that mental pain, much like physical pain, may not itself be evil. The evil is in the fact that there is something that is not quite right, which was brought about ultimately through an agent. In the former case the agent using torture and in the latter the person bringing about the ridicule, but the physical or mental pain itself need not be an evil.\footnote{For a helpful article that provides insightful discussion on differences between pain and evil, see John Kemp, “Pain and Evil,” Philosophy 29, no. 108 (January 1954): 13-26.}
Third, it seems to me that the real issue involved in the discussion of the problem from evil is not so much pain as it is in suffering or misery brought about through certain instances of pain. Suffering, I take it, as discussed in Chapter One, is closer to a lack of flourishing in the person. Severe pain may be the catalyst for suffering, but it is not necessarily equivalent to suffering. We can think of pain, whether mental or physical, as having a threshold of sorts. Much like any physical object, when enough force or pressure is applied the pain may become so unbearable that the object which feels the pain breaks or becomes debilitated in some way. That is what we often see in some cases of people suffering from certain types of depression. The person’s mental pain becomes so unbearable that she cannot function properly. Sometimes, however, the depression is brought about through a physical deficiency, such as a lack in neurotransmitters. In both cases, the person is suffering. In a similar fashion, people who have cancer often times experience excruciating pain, which may result in suffering. These are all instances of misery or suffering linked to certain forms of pain. Yet, on the flip side, we can imagine people who have no or little experience of either mental or physical pain, but who are, nevertheless, dying from some unknown disease. In such instances, the persons involved do not realize it but their bodies are no longer flourishing as they should be, because they are suffering from the disease.

Having made the above qualifications, now are we ready to answer the question of natural evil. In order to flesh this out, I will consider an argument first presented by Ed Miller and expanded on by Kirk MacGregor. Miller’s argument goes as follows:

It would be *logically impossible* to have a world without evil: Anything created by God would have to be *less* than God just by virtue of being *dependent* on him, and this means immediately that it must be less than perfect, and *this* means immediately the presence of
various sorts of imperfections. How could God create something that was perfect and therefore independent, and therefore uncreated? *It is logically impossible.*

MacGregor expands on Miller’s argument in the following way:

In other words, it is logically impossible for God to create a world without evil; if God chose to create anything at all, evil would necessarily come into existence, not because God created or caused it, but because whatever God created would not be God. Notice that all such evils are, in and of themselves, gratuitous or pointless; their only *raison d’être* is the logically unavoidable privation of ontological necessity exhibited by created entities. The only way that any created entity could display perfection is nonessentially, that is, God supernaturally acting to overwhelm or ‘make up for’ its resident imperfections; it could not display perfection in and of itself. Therefore, gratuitous evil is ontologically inescapable for contingent being every bit as much as perfection is essential to Necessary Being. Such immediately explains the existence of gratuitous natural evil; it is logically necessary to the universe, and God simply has to put up with it if he chooses to create a universe at all.

This argument by Miller and MacGregor includes some rather strong statements. On the one hand, there is something right about this argument, and I think that it points the theist in the right direction; however, it needs some qualifications. The central problem with the argument is that we can imagine all kinds of worlds, worlds that might even be metaphysically possible, that would not contain evil. We can imagine a world in which God creates one immutable object and sustains that object in existence everlastingly. While this object is both contingent and less than perfect, it does not seem to me, at least, that such a world requires evil or that evil will inevitably take place due to the contingency and less-than-perfect nature of the thing involved. Neither contingency nor imperfection nor finiteness requires evil in-and-of-themselves. Even if we were to take all of these together, as in the case of the finite object, no evil is required. Now whether God has good reasons to create such a world or not is beyond the point. It seems to me that such a world is logically (and metaphysically) possible, and hence the Miller/MacGregor argument

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fails in that sense. But here is where I think their argument got it right. They grounded their argument in the Creator/creature distinction. There are certain logical limitations to any world that God might create due to the sheer nature of its being finite, imperfect, and contingent. Perhaps they could have qualified their argument to say something to this effect: It would be logically impossible for God to create a world that is dynamic with natural processes such as ours without some ensuing evil due to its imperfect, finite, and contingent nature.

Given the above insights form the Miller/MacGregor argument, the theist might put forth an argument for natural evil as follows:

(1) If God exists, God would have strong reasons for creating a complex, multileveled world with a great diversity of biological creatures, including creatures that are sentient and intelligent. Some of the highly complex intelligent creatures, namely humans, are capable of having meaningful experiences and entering into significant relationships with God, one another, other creatures, and their environments.

(2) Because such creatures are biological and physical in nature, the world had to be ordered according to a set of natural laws or law-like regulating principles. Given what we know scientifically about the universe, physical life, and especially human life, as we know it, could not exist unless things were ‘fine-tuned’ in such a way.

(3) The universe, as it now stands, consists of a great variety of goods, both in its physical grandeur and beauty and in the flourishing of a great diversity of biological life that it contains. Consequently, such a world also brings with it the possibility that sentient and intelligent life will be negatively affected by the physical processes that govern the formation and operations of the universe, resulting in a great amount of suffering and death.

(4) Since we have no reason for thinking that God could have brought about a world with alternative natural laws for supporting life as we know it, and yet a world that consists of great potential for good, or, at least, a balance of good and evil, God is morally justified in creating such a world that contains natural evils.  

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Perhaps the skeptic might respond in a couple of ways. She might ask, “Why could God not have changed the natural processes in order to bring about a world free of evil?” There are several problems with this response. First, we have no guarantee that, even if God were to change the natural processes, they, too, would not go wrong. How do we know that such processes would not result in much greater natural evils than what we see in the world already? Second, why should we jettison processes that work well most of the time? Take, for instance, our genetic processes. Though genetic processes do sometimes result in mutations, this is not the norm. The same might be said with respect to the case of natural disasters. As noted previously, the same mechanisms that cause these great disasters are also essential for normal operations in the earth. Most of the time these processes function extremely well.91 Third, as Bruce Reichenbach argues, changing or altering the natural laws would affect the various constituents that make up the world. He explains,

The introduction of different natural laws affecting human beings in order to prevent the frequent instances of natural evil would entail the alteration of human beings themselves. Human beings are sentient creatures of nature. As physiological beings they interact with Nature; they cause natural events and in turn are affected by natural events. Hence, insofar as humans are natural, sentient beings, constructed of the same substance as Nature and interacting with it, they will be affected in any natural system by lawful natural events. These events sometimes will be propitious and sometimes not. And insofar as man is essentially a conscious being, he will be aware of those events which are not propitious and which for him constitute evils. Therefore, to prevent natural evils from affecting man, man himself would have to be significantly changed, such that he would be no longer a sentient creature of nature.92

There is a second response the skeptic might put forward. Since God is omnipotent, as theists believe, why could God not create a world in which He miraculously intervenes to

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prevent natural evils? There are several responses to this objection. First, could it not be that God is already miraculously responding to certain natural evils, such that His working is keeping more natural evils from happening than what we are aware of? Second, a world whereby God always miraculously intervenes would result in creatures who are incapable of understanding the significance of their actions. It is only in a world such as ours, with natural processes and one governed by natural law-like features, that human freedom can be exercised in a meaningful way. 93 Third, such a world would be highly unpredictable and irregular. As Reichenbach further explains:

But without the regularity which results from the governance of natural laws, rational action would be impossible. Without regularity of sequence, agents could not entertain rational explanations, make predictions, estimate probabilities, or calculate prudence. They would not be able to know what to expect about any course of action they would like to take. Whether or not such action would be possible, what they would have to do to have God bring it about, whether it could occur as they planned (supposing agents could plan, which is doubtful), what the consequences would be—all this would be unknown and unknowable. Hence, agents could not know or even suppose what course of action to take to accomplish a certain rationally conceived goal. Thus rational agents could neither propose action nor act themselves.94

Moreover, it is highly doubtful that humans could be fully functioning moral agents in such a world, since being a moral agent requires not only the ability to act but also to propose some course of action. A highly irregular world would prevent both proposing a course of action and acting on it.95 But suppose the critic responds by suggesting that there is a middle ground, so to speak, that is to say, a world partially ruled by natural processes and partially ruled by miraculous intervention. Again, Reichenbach is insightful on this point:

95 Ibid., 104.
But what would such a world be like? Presumably, a world which was only partially operated by miracle would be one in which God would allow events at some times to follow a “regular pattern,” and at other times not. That is, sometimes causal conditions $x$ and $y$ would result in effect $z$, and at other times they would be followed by an effect of a different sort. For example, heavy snowfall in the mountains and collapse of snow walls will cause an avalanche to proceed down the mountain slope according to the law of gravity when no sentient creatures is in its path; but should a climber be present, either that which causes the avalanche “regularly” will not have this effect this time, or the avalanche will still occur but will swerve around the climber or halt at his feet. But natural laws such as the law of gravity assert universal and necessary connections between phenomena. Then if events sometimes followed a “regular pattern” and sometimes not, there would be no natural laws regarding that particular event. But then the appeal to a “regular pattern” is specious, for “regular pattern” presupposes that there are normative natural laws which describe or govern the course of events, so that one can distinguish what is regular from what is irregular. “Regular pattern” has meaning only within the context of natural laws. Furthermore, if this absence of universal and necessary connections is widespread, as would seem to be required in order to prevent all natural evils, the world would have few if any natural laws; it would, in effect, be governed by miraculous intervention. Thus, though this so-called middle ground would remove the contradiction with respect to the possibility of human action vis-à-vis being free, the consequences of it still would be such as to make rational prediction and rational action impossible, and hence to make moral action impossible.\footnote{Ibid., 107-108.}

It would seem, then, that theists have good reasons for supposing the need for a world such as ours.

Before moving on to a comparison between the four metaphysical systems on explaining evil, it would be helpful to consider one last issue—the difficult problem of animal pain and death. How might the theist respond?

Unlike its metaphysical rivals, theism provides within it the resources for thinking that there might be some kind of compensation for animal life in the end. Many theistic traditions hold to something like an afterlife, and all three major theistic traditions hold to the resurrection of the dead. Christianity and Judaism both take it that there will be a future restoration of creation. Now, there are differences of opinion on what things will be like in the end times, and each theistic tradition will have to work this out. All that I am suggesting, here, is that there is a
significant possibility for animal compensation and that theism, if God is omnipotent, could bring about such a state.  

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CHAPTER 6: METAPHYSICAL SYSTEMS AND EVIL PART 5

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Having examined each of the four metaphysical systems, I now turn to a comparative analysis, examining how well each answers the phenomena evil based on the following criteria:

(A) Factual Adequacy
(B) Logical Consistency
(C) Explanatory Power
(D) Explanatory Scope
(E) Ad hoc-ness
(F) Plausibility
   (1) How Plausible of an explanation is the theory/hypothesis in itself?
   (2) How plausible of an explanation is the theory/hypothesis relative to the other hypotheses?
(G) Livability

Factual Adequacy

Regarding factual adequacy (A), to what extent can the naturalist or pantheist make sense of the salient facts of evil—the types and kinds of evil in the world (moral and natural), along with the quantity and intensity of such evils? It would seem that, if one were take a position such as Levine’s, a pantheist may have a better time of making sense of moral evil in the world than those forms of pantheism which deny the reality of good and evil altogether, or at least see evil as nothing more than an illusion. One would have to adopt some kind of principle which always promotes the good. But making sense of how a principle enforces or promotes the good is difficult and needs further explication on the part of the pantheist. Given something like the karmic system, how can such a law or principle judge as to whether a person has done the right or enough good, especially since laws, principles, and forces are not the kinds of things that can judge?
For naturalism, in order to make sense of evil, apart from adopting some ad hoc hypothesis, such as Platonism or moral supervenience—both of which are not a given from naturalistic assumptions—it seems that all the naturalist can do, given her system, is to say that evil (if we can call it that) is a by-product of the way things are. Richard Dawkins has this to say about evil, pain, and suffering in the world:

The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. During the minute that it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive, many others are running their lives, whimpering with fear; others are slowly being devoured from within by rasping parasites; thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst, and disease. It must be so. If there ever is a time of plenty, this very fact will automatically lead to an increase in the population until the natural state of starvation and misery is restored. . . . In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.¹

It would seem that naturalism is, at bottom, incapable of providing a satisfactory understanding of evil. Moreover, both pantheistic and naturalistic systems deny such a thing as natural evil in the world. No doubt that the effects of things like hurricanes or disease are tragic, but those kinds of things cannot be properly called evils, despite how it affects either the human or the animal realm. Naturalism also has a difficult time explaining moral evils, since a world like “evil” where moral evils are considered is hard to square with its determinism or near determinism.

But what of process panentheism (PPT) and theism? Here, I take it that both Process panentheism and theism fare better at explaining the salient facts of evil than either naturalism or pantheism. Each system recognizes that there is such a thing as evil in the world and both have unique ways of answering the question of evil. Moral evil, given libertarian freedom, is not at all surprising in either system. For the defender of PPT, while it possible to explain the notions of

good and evil in the world, there are some central difficulties. One difficulty is that the PPT view
of good and evil depends heavily on process metaphysics. While certain aspects of process
metaphysics may turn out to be true, it is difficult to understand how we can have events without
things. Moreover, the whole process metaphysic centers on creativity, but, even, here, there is
nothing that underlines or grounds the creativity necessary for the various occasions to take
place. A second difficulty is that Process thinkers must couch good and evil primarily in
aesthetic terms rather than moral ones. This goes against how good and evil are usually
understood, despite the fact that there may well be all manner of organic connections between
the good and the beautiful. But even more so, if aesthetic principles take priority, then a number
of moral principles may be violated in order to achieve the aims of those aesthetic principles.
Even more damaging, however, is the fact that it seems the sufferings and pains of creatures
become a means to an end in order for God to achieve certain aesthetic purposes.

Perhaps, the greatest difficulty for theism is explaining the existence of natural evil, and
particularly animal pain, although a world that operates according to certain stable natural laws is
better than one ruled by unpredictable miraculous intervention. Furthermore, as argued in the
previous chapter, such a world that has elements of risk, as our world does, has greater
significance than ones without such risks. Lastly, theists recognize that such a world, finite,
dynamic, and limited, inevitably leads to imperfection, especially if God has granted the creation
to have a certain amount of freedom to be and to operate as *He created it to be*. This
understanding demonstrates an important metaphysical principle recognized by theists that there
is a significant difference between the Creator and the creature, which theists base on the
contingency of the world (whether logically or temporally) and the necessity and eternality of
God. Regarding animal pain, while theists face difficulties, there are resources within theism that
provide partial explanations of the facts. For example, animals, like humans, are part of a
dynamic, contingent, and limited system that, while on the whole operates and functions
properly, may nevertheless result in some destruction when animal and human life are affected
by such processes. Furthermore, as we saw, theists might rightly reject the hedonistic principle
that all pain is evil. Pain, much like tectonic plates and the like, though it may lead to suffering,
is an important part of the proper function of certain forms of biological life. In addition, pain
may even lead to certain forms of flourishing (e.g., when someone perseveres through a rigorous
physical routine in order to achieve a goal). While no doubt animal pain and predation provide
difficulties for theists, and there is much more work that needs done in this area, there is reason
to believe, however, that (1) pain in humans is quite different than pain in animals and (2) that
theism likely features resources to redeem animal suffering that exceed those of this world.

**Logical Consistency**

As far as logical consistency (B) is concerned, naturalism is a fairly consistent and
straightforward system; yet it stumbles in explaining moral facts. Many naturalists try to hold to
some kind of objectivist view of morality, but naturalism as a system likely does not provide its
best explanations, apart from *ad-hoc* explanations. Furthermore, if one finds Alvin Plantinga’s
evolutionary argument against naturalism successful, it would seem that one of the key tenets of
naturalism—belief in evolution—does not fit well within the naturalistic schema.\(^2\) Regarding evil
in the world, given how we normally classify something as evil, in order to remain consistent
with the naturalistic worldview, such classifications as moral and natural evil do not make nearly

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\(^2\) Alvin Plantinga’s “Is Naturalism Irrational?” in *The Analytic Theist: an Alvin Plantinga Reader*, edited by
James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 72-96; idem. *Where the Conflict
comment regarding this in footnote 67 of Chapter Two.
as good sense within the naturalistic worldview as some of the other alternatives considered. The various kinds and variety and intensity of evil are just a part of the way things are.

Pantheism is much less straightforward a system. It is difficult to nail down just what a pantheist means by things like the divine, all-inclusive Unity, or Absolute. Minimally, pantheists agree that there is a Unity and this Unity is in some sense divine. But with respect to the Unity, how much better off is the pantheist than the naturalist? How is the pantheistic Unity any stronger of a unity than the naturalistic understanding of the four-dimensional space-time universe? Furthermore, pantheists are not agreed over whether all reality is one substance (monism) or if a plurality of substances (pluralism) exists (or exist) in the world. Pantheists like Levine seek to eschew, or at least put on hold, a conclusion about the notion of substance, opting for some minimal kind of explanation like a force or organizing principle that brings order to the various parts of the universe. But it is hard to see how this solves the problem of ambiguity within the pantheistic system. Epistemically, what reasons do we have for thinking something like Levine’s notion of the organizing principle or force is the case? Perhaps the pantheist can employ the anthropic principle and something like neo-Darwinian evolution as supporting evidence that something is behind the events in the universe. But as shown earlier, the pantheist will run up against the difficulties that such a system face with the notions of eternity and necessity. With respect to the metaphysics of good and evil, it does seem that a pantheist can, at least, provide some categories for thinking about morality and evil that are consistent within its system. If one were to take a view such as Levine’s, then one might say good is that which promotes the divine Unity, while evil is that which goes against it.

Process panentheism is less straightforward than naturalism, yet it is generally consistent. This consistency, however, depends quite a bit on Whitehead’s complex process
metaphysics. For PPT, the “many,” the “one,” and “creativity” are central features of reality, although, as we have suggested throughout, serious difficulties saddle Whitehead’s metaphysics, namely, the concept of creativity. If God is not the primary organizing source, then what is? Process thinkers believe that it is creativity, but just what is “creativity”? It is not its own entity, nor does anything ground it; nevertheless, it is behind all the goings on in reality. This leaves us wondering: From whence does the energy that fuels the universe come? What perpetuates this endless supply of creativity? Many defenders of PPT bite the bullet and accept the principle of creativity as brute fact. If one were to grant it, suggests the process theists, then all else would follow. But this is something that theists will be unwilling to do. Furthermore, much rides on the notion that the fundamental basic unit of reality is the actual occasion or event, instead of substance. Here, too, as I have argued in Chapter Four, there is reason to doubt this particular tenet of process metaphysics. Much of the PPT view on good and evil is parasitic on these two features of process metaphysics. Despite these difficulties, taken on its own terms, PPT is logically consistent—more so than either pantheism or naturalism.

Theism, like naturalism, is a straightforward system, though it is more complex. Despite its complexity, theism is, nevertheless, overall consistent. Most attacks on theism come from the phenomena of evil in the world. As I have argued, given something like human libertarian freedom and a natural order that is governed by laws or law-like regularities, and given the finite and dynamic nature of the world that is other than God, there is nothing logically inconsistent about God’s existence and evil in the world. Furthermore, Alvin Plantinga, in God, Freedom, and Evil, has shown that there is no logical inconsistency between the existence of God and the existence of evil in the world, something to which most atheists will agree. This still leaves
important questions to ask concerning evil, to which distinctive aspects of Christian theology, I will argue in later chapters, are relevant.

**Explanatory Power and Scope**

How well do each of the metaphysical systems fare at explanatory power (C) and explanatory scope (D)? As noted, in order to explain the concept of evil, one must explain life, consciousness, the metaphysics of good and evil, and moral responsibility. Naturalists, pantheists, and panentheists all have a hard time explaining the nature of the universe, which is essential to explaining the existence of life.

Each of the three non-theistic systems runs up against the problem of infinite regress. Naturalists often posit something like the multiverse in order to explain the anthropic principle. But positing the multiverse only complicates the naturalistic hypothesis. Not only now do they need to explain the anthropic principle, but an eternal universe generator of sorts. Pantheists, too, have their own troubles. While a pantheist may hold to something like the anthropic principle and neo-Darwinian evolution in their systems, given that the pantheistic understanding of a force or unifying principle is at work at organizing the universe, it runs up against the problem of necessity and the eternality of the universe. If the universe at any time began to exist, as confirmed by standard Big Bang cosmology, then it would seem difficult to explain how the universe is identical to God in any meaningful way. For if God transcends the universe, would we, then, truly have a pantheistic system? But on the other hand, if all things exploded forth through the Big Bang, this leaves the problem of where it all came from—something would have truly come from nothing. Yet, as noted, actual infinites are impossible in the world and would lead to all kinds of absurdities. Defenders of PPT, too, fail in adequately explaining the existence of the universe. Like naturalists, process panentheists take it that something has always existed—
though the universe, as we know it, has not. More so than pantheism or naturalism, PPT as a metaphysical system provides some explanation for the anthropic principle. God is the motivation behind the universe getting its start and direction, but how the universe has turned out is not entirely up to God. Yet, why is there a God or nature in the first place? Here, the theist can press the defender of PPT. While there is a sense that in the “primordial pole” God is both “eternal” and “infinite,” we cannot, nevertheless, properly call God “necessary” or “eternal” in the same sense that theists can. God, for defenders of PPT, is dependent on a universe for His actualization. It does not have to be this universe; rather, all that is needed is a universe. But not only is God’s actualization dependent on a universe, so too is God’s existence. God and the world are co-dependent and intricately connected. If there were no world (pre-existing matter and the like before the Big Bang), then we can presume that there would be no God, either. Theists take it that God is both eternal and necessary. God’s eternality and necessity are fundamental features of God’s nature, that without which God would not be God. Theists, then, do not run up against the problem of infinite regress as naturalists, pantheists, and panentheists do.

Regarding consciousness, physicalism cannot provide an adequate explanation. Naturalistic and pantheistic physicalists cannot properly explain consciousness within their systems. But as was shown, a pantheist may hold to any number of other possibilities, such as animism, dualism, or panpsychism, which may provide grounds for consciousness. Consciousness, then, is more likely within a pantheistic system than in naturalism. As was shown in the discussion on PPT, however, there are some major difficulties with panexperientialism, such as the combination problem. The combination problem not only affects panexperientialism; it also affects pansychist theories on consciousness. How about theism and consciousness? As
with naturalistic and pantheistic views, any attempt at adopting a physicalist form of consciousness fails; however, most theists hold to dualism, the view whereby the mind is in some sense distinct from the body. In Chapter Five three lines of argument were given in support of dualism. First, if God Himself is an unembodied mind, then theists have as an exemplar or paradigm-case of what an unembodied mind is like. Second, theists have at their disposal certain empirical evidence from NDEs and post-death visions. Third, and lastly, theists have the unity-of-consciousness argument. As argued, all that one need to show is a minimalistic version of dualism in order to have consciousness, which theists can do.

Lastly, how does each of the four metaphysical systems fare at explaining the metaphysics of good and evil and moral responsibility? It would seem that a pantheist can better accommodate the notions of good, evil, and morality than can a naturalist, provided that one hold to something like Levine’s modified command theory, whereby one does what promotes the Unity and avoids those things which defy it. The ground for the “good” is the Unity itself, which always promotes the good and moral rightness. Evil and moral wrongness, then, is that which goes against the Unity. But what exactly is it that promotes the Unity? How are we to make sense of this? The pantheist will need to flesh this out more if he expects for his system to provide greater explanatory power. The strength of the pantheistic system—that such a system can provide some explanation for morality—is counteracted by the lack of clarity in the metaphysics behind key parts of the system. Arguably the best that a naturalist can do for explaining morality, without adding ad hoc hypotheses, is to offer a naturalistic explanation grounded in neo-Darwinian evolution. But such attempts are ultimately insufficient. No matter how deeply committed to and intent on doing the just or virtuous thing that a naturalist might be, it is difficult to see how one can get obligation out of genetic predispositions, imperatives out of
indicatives. Furthermore, within the naturalistic system, what we generally call evil is a necessary feature of the cosmos. Regarding human responsibility, for pantheistic systems that are deterministic in nature, it is hard to make sense of human responsibility. But as Levine has argued, pantheism need not entail determinism. Some kind of libertarian freedom, I have argued, is necessary if we are to make sense of human responsibility. If we are to understand human freedom as libertarian, it must be seen in connection to the divine unity and in some sense found within the basic structures of the universe. Both defenders of PPT and theism can accommodate human freedom within their systems. For theists, humans were created with libertarian freedom, and, hence, they generally have the capacity to do otherwise. Process panentheists, on the other hand, recognize that freedom is a basic feature of all actual entities, and especially human creatures, who have a greater capacity of freedom. Regarding good and evil, as I have argued throughout, neither is surprising given theism. There is reason to expect certain forms of moral evil given human libertarian freedom. Furthermore, based on the Creator/creature distinction, the finite and limited nature of the world, the various processes needed to sustain biological life, and that the world is dynamic, it is not at all surprising that certain kinds of natural evil may result. Theists also believe that God is the good, or at least perfectly good, and the ground for all moral action, both our source and moral telos. For theists, not only is God the ground for good, but God has also established a moral order that humans are to abide by. Lastly, theists believe that not only does God have the power to overcome evil, but eventually He will do so, carving out important room for rational hope in the face of the problem of evil. For process panentheists, good and evil can be explained; however, it is at the risk of redefining evil to fit in primarily aesthetic categories. This is problematic, however. While doing so does not completely wipe out evil in moral terms, the moral categories become subordinate to aesthetic ones, which, as
discussed earlier, allows for certain moral principles to be violated, perhaps even vitiated. There are, however, two other problems with PPT, as we saw. God, for process panentheists, is limited, and there is no eschatological payoff. There is no guarantee that evil will ever be thwarted in the end. The problem of evil defeats hope of ultimate resolution.

**Ad Hoc-ness**

To what extent do these metaphysical system provide *ad hoc* explanations (E)? It would seem that both naturalistic and pantheistic systems have some elements of *ad hoc*-ness. For naturalists, and pantheists like Harrison, this is mostly seen with respect to positing something like the multiverse—whether such a thing as the multiverse is true or not—in order to explain the anthropic principle. Yet it is also taken to be somewhat of a backdoor way of arguing for certain metaphysical conclusions about the nature of the universe (e.g., that nature is all there is, was, or ever will be). But as Paul Davies pointed out, this only puts the problem one step removed. The same could be said with respect to positing something like Stephen Hawking’s space-time curvature hypothesis. Both the multiverse and space-time curvature hypotheses come across as *ad hoc* efforts to provide explanation for the apparent design of life and to show that the universe is all that there is.

What of pantheists? Whether one takes it as *ad hoc* or not, it seems that for both Harrison and Levine, with respect to their brand of pantheism, the standard method of argumentation is to show why various other systems do not work, and then to make assertions regarding their own systems about how things either are or could be. Assertions, however, are not arguments, nor do they sufficiently ground metaphysical positions.

Perhaps the chief difficulty of process panentheism is its postulation of creativity as the underlying metaphysical principle. Yet defenders of PPT have not given reason to think that such
a principle underlies all of reality. Furthermore, they have not shown what this principle is, the very principle on which the whole process system stands or falls.

Theists too may be charged with some *ad hoc*-ness in their system, especially pertaining to the afterlife. The notion of an afterlife is an important aspect of the theistic system, without which it would be difficult to make sense of God’s bringing the world to rights and final justice. What reason is there for thinking that something like the afterlife is true? How might the theist respond? There are at least two lines of argument a theist might give regarding an afterlife. First, as discussed earlier in this chapter, there is veridical evidence for both near-death experiences and post-death visions. Furthermore, there are modern documented cases of people returning to life after having been prayed for. While the evidence does not conclusively guarantee an afterlife, it does give theists reasons for thinking that there might be something like an afterlife. Second, if God is omnipotent, there is reason to believe that He could do something like bring people back from the dead, as in the notion of the resurrection. For example, Christians take it that God raised Jesus from the dead. They base this on a variety of historical evidences. Now, if the Christian theist can show that God raising Jesus from the dead makes better sense of the historical data than do the best naturalistic theories, and if they can show that miracles are possible in a world such as ours, then the theist is within her epistemic right to believe in something along the lines of an afterlife. Taken together, these reasons for thinking there is such a thing as an afterlife can do much to dispense with the charge of *ad hoc*-ness in theism.

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Plausibility

Regarding plausibility (F), it seems that neither the naturalistic nor the pantheistic hypothesis, by itself, is plausible given evil, or at least given how we generally think of evil, in the world. Perhaps the critic might think this judgment unfair, especially since pantheism provides some reasons for thinking that something like evil exists as something that disrupts or goes against the divine Unity. Perhaps it would increase the plausibility of pantheism if it could explain just what it is that such a disruption consists of, or, more importantly, just what the divine Unity is. Yet, in comparing the two hypothesis, it would seem that the notion of evil is more plausible given pantheism than naturalism. Though naturalism as a metaphysical system is more consistent than pantheism (provided that we grant neo-Darwinian evolution), it lacks in both explanatory power and scope when it comes to our general understanding of the concepts of evil. It fails to adequately explain life, consciousness, the metaphysics of good and evil, and human responsibility. Pantheism, though it lacks overall coherence and consistency, fares much better at explaining each of these, particularly the latter three. Yet its overall explanatory adequacy depends on whether or not pantheism can give us good reason to think that the universe has always existed. From the above analysis, it does not seem that it can.

PPT as a metaphysical system provides a better explanation of the salient facts of good and evil, morality and human responsibility, the anthropic principle, and consciousness than do either pantheism or naturalism. However, while there is an overall greater explanatory force to PPT, it too suffers from the same major difficulty that both pantheism and naturalism face, namely, the problem of infinite regress. There is also a yet more damaging difficulty with the PPT view: it cannot adequately explain the nature of its fundamental metaphysical principle. What is this creativity grounded in? What supplies it with its endless energy? Process panentheists do not have an answer for this. Granting such a principle as creativity (which theists
are unwilling to do) would elucidate the concepts of good and evil from the process panentheistic perspective, though, as we have seen, it requires redefining good and evil in primarily aesthetic terms, which is problematic, since moral principles become subordinate to aesthetic principles.

Lastly, there are two additional problems with PPT. First, the concept of a limited God raises several difficulties. Can such a God really do anything about evil in the world? Perhaps the process panentheist will argue that the God of panentheism can suffer along with his creatures and provide them with the initial aims to direct them toward a more harmonious and intense reality. As discussed, we might commend such a God for the work in thwarting evil and choose to fight along in the good fight, but in the end, would such a God be worship worthy? It seems not. Furthermore, it is not at all clear how the God of PPT directs the affairs of all the world in sending the initial aims, given that the actual entities are responding to such aims immediately. How does such a God send these aims instantaneously without the kind of omniscience ascribed to the God of theism, particularly some kind of knowledge of the future free acts of the actual entities? It would seem that this would be needed for the creatures to make the right decisions necessary to follow God’s aims and purposes. Second, there does not seem to be much of an eschatological payoff for God’s creatures if they choose to follow God. At most, all of God’s creatures’ lives are in some sense absorbed into God’s experience, remaining a part of God’s self-actualization. Some process thinkers are open to the idea of an afterlife, but do not press it as a significant part of the PPT view. Thus while PPT is more plausible of a system for explaining evil than either naturalism or panentheism, this is necessary but not sufficient to argue that it is plausible in and of itself. It is quite an ingenious system, but quite a few unexplainable features undermine its ultimate face plausibility.
Lastly, we consider theism. Of the three systems, theism can genuinely explain evil based on its major tenets. It can do so without redefining good and evil, and it can do so by understanding such locutions how most people understand the words, that is, without equivocal or idiosyncratic meanings. Furthermore, theism adequately answers each of the four areas: life, consciousness, the metaphysics of good and evil, and human freedom. This does not mean that there are no difficulties for theism. There are still many areas that theists must work out. The areas of consciousness and the problem of animal pain are just two key areas that need further attention. That additional work is needed does not hinder theism from providing a partial explanation to such issues. Moreover, theists believe that God has created the world with a moral order, and it is God Himself who is the standard for the good that we see in this order. If we take it that God made humans to be like Him in certain respects (e.g., the Christian and Jewish understanding of the *imago dei*), we have good reason for thinking that the world and its order is knowable and understandable. It is because of the established moral order and God’s creating humans to be like Him that people can recognize that certain things are right and wrong. They can see the moral order of things, even if they chose not to follow it. Lastly, the God of theism can genuinely do things about the evil in the world. While God may have general policies in place such as libertarian freedom with respect to His human creatures and law-like regulatory processes in nature, it does not mean that God is inactive or can do nothing about the evil in the world. Furthermore, given the theistic understanding of afterlife, it does seem that there is something akin to eschatological payoff for God’s creatures when it is all said and done (e.g., resurrection, restoration of creation, and so on). Lastly, there is the possibility of final justice for the evils committed in this world. In all, it seems that theism not only provides a more plausible
explanation given the other metaphysical systems when it comes to explaining evil, but theism provides a plausible explanation in and of itself.

**Livability**

There is, however, one more consideration: How livable is each of the four metaphysical systems (G)? Naturalism, at bottom, is the thinnest of the four systems. Not only does it provide no grounding for objective morality or for human responsibility, it has a bleak outlook on life. There is no afterlife or personal immortality. Moreover, there is no ultimate assurance that the work we do on the earth provides any ultimate significance. Nor is there any final vindication for the evils that we experience in the world.

Certain forms of pantheism hold to laws or principles within the Unity, such as karma or dharma, which suggestively promote justice within the universe. But the critic will want to know just how such laws or principles of cause and effect bring about justice? Do they function like the laws of nature? It is hard to see how the effects of morally significant actions can be equated with the effects brought about by the laws of physics, unless, of course, all things are determined. After all, many theists would agree with something like natural law theories of ethics, that such laws are in some sense “built in,” but they also recognize that the universe itself cannot explain such theories. Furthermore, another issue is the administration of justice. How can such laws administer justice if broken? It is not at all clear that a law or principle can. A yet further issue is this: Are the laws themselves eternally existing, or were such laws put in place by God? Pantheists are in basic disagreement about this. Regarding immortality, some pantheists teach that there is such a thing as an afterlife. Some hold to the existence of individual souls living on after death, while others hold that eventually all things will be absorbed back into Absolute or the Unity. While there is some hope in the former, the latter leads to a bleak outlook on life.
Defenders of PPT recognize that there is a moral order. The God of PPT sends initial aims to its creatures in hopes that the actual entities will chose the right path which will ultimately lead to higher levels of harmony and greater intensity. But why should any of God’s creatures follow suit? Why should these actual entities heed God’s initial aim? But even more damaging is that many of these actual entities are incapable of making any kind of rational decision. Such capacities are found only in the higher forms of genuine societies. If these entities rebel against God (if we can even call it that), there is no ultimate justice for their rebellion, despite their response to God’s initial aims. Even more troubling is PPT’s theodicy. The process theodicy is not strongly eschatological. I would agree with Stephen T. Davis that any theodical solution to the problem of evil must maintain some kind of reference to the future. In response to the theodicy put forth by Griffin, Davis asks “[D]oes God have the power, influence, or persuasive ability to make the divine intentions succeed?”5 If the process understanding of God is correct, then all that we can say is that God’s desires might come out in the end. There is, however, no ultimate assurance or guarantee that they will. At best, Davis says, we might say that God is a good being who works hard. We might even sympathize with such a God, joining in the fight to thwart evil. But such a God would not be worthy of worship. Unless God is able to bring about more good in the world than evil, such a God would be fully indictable.6 Davis puts it as follows: “God will be something like a mad scientist who creates a monster he hopes will behave but whom he cannot control; if the monster does more evil than good the scientist’s


6 Ibid., 130-131.
decision to create the monster will turn out to have been terribly wrong. The scientist will be
indicitable.”

Naturalism, pantheism, and panentheism also each face the same fate—the pending doom
of the universe. As William Lane Craig so forcefully puts it:

And the universe, too, faces a death of its own. Scientists tell us that the universe is
expanding, and the galaxies are growing farther and farther apart. As it does so, it grows
colder and colder, and its energy is used up. Eventually all the stars will burn out, and all
matter will collapse into dead stars and black holes. There will be no light at all; there will
be no heat; there will be no life; only the corpses of dead stars and galaxies, ever expanding
into the endless darkness and the cold recesses of space—a universe in ruins. This is not
science fiction. The entire universe marches irreversibly toward its grave. So not only is the
life of each individual person doomed; the entire human race is doomed. The universe is
plunging toward inevitable extinction—death is written throughout its structure. There is no
escape. There is no hope.

For the naturalist, there is no escaping that such an outcome is the conclusion of all of our human
efforts to achieve greatness. What, in the end, have all of our scientific progress and discoveries
accomplished? For the pantheist, the same organizing force lying behind all of life, animating the
very world we live in, ultimately leads the world to its final demise. It is hard to see how a God
that is not all-powerful could turn things around for the hope of the world. In the end, would such
a God—indifferent as it may be—care? What of the God of PPT? Could such a God do any
better? Here, it would seem, the mad scientist strikes again. Just as there is no guarantee that the
world will turn out with more good than evil, so too is there no guarantee that the world will
avoid its impending doom. What, then, becomes of all of God’s work? What becomes of God?
Would God, then, begin the whole evolutionary process over again, keeping at it until all things

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7 Stephen Davis, “God the Mad Scientist: Process Theology on God and Evil,” *Themelios* 5, no. 1
(September, 1979), 23.

8 William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd edition (Wheaton, IL:
finally turn out as planned? In the end, we might forecast the eschatological payoff of each metaphysical system as follows: bleak (process panentheism); bleaker (pantheism); and bleakest (naturalism).

Of the four systems, only theism provides a metaphysical system that is livable in the face of evil. Theism provides within it the resources needed to not only explain why the world is in the shape that it is, but it also provides a solution to the evil in the world. Theism recognizes that there is something really wrong with the world. It is not how it should be. As Stephen Davis rightly points out, “[t]he world is not worthwhile as it stands: it needs to be redeemed.” Only a God who is powerful enough to act in the world and who is religiously available to His creatures can bring about the kind of changes needed to thwart evil. Moreover, theists believe that the world will eventually be put to right. There will be final vindication for all wrongs committed, and many of God’s creatures will share in a blissful afterlife. Lastly, if God created all things, including the entire four-dimensional space-time universe, as theists believe, then there is no reason to think that God could not stop the impending doom that lies in store for the universe. Only a God who is infinite in power can keep the universe from reaching its ultimate doom and restore it to its original intended goodness.

**Concluding Thoughts**

In Chapters Two through Five, I have sought to compare four metaphysical systems. Throughout, I have argued that of the four metaphysical systems considered, theism best explains the phenomena of evil in the world. I have not argued that theism explains all things well or that it explains every instance of evil. That was not my goal; rather, I have only sought to

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argue that theism explains evil as well as or better than its metaphysical rivals. In the previous chapter I argued that theism adequately explains life, consciousness, the metaphysics of good and evil, and human responsibility, and does so better than its rivals. Moreover, I argued that theism is livable in the face of evil and provides an overall thicker worldview response.

Before moving on to the next chapter, there is one final challenge the theist must face. To see this challenge, it will be helpful to consider a quote from H. P. Owen summarizing Charles Hartshorne’s critique of Classical theism:

In particular, Hartshorne maintains that the self-sufficient, changeless God of classical theism cannot possess the property of love that Christian theists attribute to him. If God is love he must be a ‘social’ being. He (like any member of human society) must be affected by the objects of his love; he must be pained by their sufferings and enriched by their achievements. If he did not need his human creatures for the completion of his being he would not have any reason for creating them. ‘A being which contains, in sheer independence of others, all possible perfection and value must surely know better than to clutter up existence with beings which can add nothing to the value that would exist without them’ (50).

There is much going on, here, and I cannot feasibly consider the entirety of this objection in these concluding remarks. Much of this objection I will consider in the final chapters. For now, I would like to focus on Hartshorne’s point that if God is love, then it necessitates that God be a social being. If Hartshorne is correct, then it raises a fundamental problem for the theist. Either God needs the world to demonstrate His love or God does not have love as an essential attribute. Many if not most theists recognize that love is an essential attribute of God. Moreover, if God were not loving, as the preponderance of theists believe, then could theists provide an adequate answer to the problem from evil? But in order for God to feature love as an essential property, there must be something for God to love. Theists will want to avoid saying that God must create in order to love something other than Himself, since such an admission suggests that God is not

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complete in-and-of-Himself, deficient in aseity. God would then need something other than God’s self for His completion, which results in a form of panentheism.

A way out for the theists is available, however. We can make a distinction here between “Unitarian” theism and “Trinitarian” theism. Unitarian theists believe that God consists of only one person. Trinitarian theists, on the other hand, recognize that God is more than one person (presumably three). By this, they do not mean that there is more than one God; rather, they mean that within this one God there exists more than one person (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). If one were to accept a Trinitarian understanding of God over a Unitarian view, one can avoid either horn of the Hartshornean dilemma. This is the move that I will pursue and argue for in the pages that follow. We shall we now turn to the Christian worldview.
As discussed in the previous chapter, Christian theists have a different perspective on the concept of God from other theists. Central to the Christian claim is a concept of God that is tri-personal in nature. It is precisely this concept of a Trinitarian God that enables a theist to resist slipping into panentheism, whereby God is in some sense dependent on creation for His actualization—something from which most all theists will want to steer away. If God depends on creation, then God would not be the greatest conceivable being, since such a view would call into question God’s perfection and necessary existence. In what follows I will outline a sketch of the mere Christian concept of God and worldview proposed in Chapter One. I do not claim that all Christians will accept my conclusions, but this will be, rather, a sketch of what I take most Christians to believe. As noted in the introduction, it may be that some denominations or traditions will want to tweak what I say below. That is fine. My intention is to put forth a basic overview of what I take to be the Christian worldview, centered on the perichoretic relationship of the Triune God. I want to show how the perichoretic relationship of the persons of the Godhead may shed light on various other core doctrines of the Christian faith.

I begin by showing that there is a clear connection between God’s nature and morality. I then argue that the perichoretic relationship between the persons of the Trinity provide the paradigm for thinking about God’s intentions for creation and that it gives us a clue for the *telos* of creation, that is to say, from the beginning of creation, God has had intentions of bringing about, what I will call, the *perichoretic kingdom*.
Light, Love, and Fellowship

The brief New Testament letter of 1 John makes two striking claims about God—“God is light” and “God is love.” These claims provide for the Elder a theological framework and ethical vision for the small community of believers.¹

Throughout Scripture, ‘light’ is often used as a metaphor to reflect certain characteristics of God, His revelation, or salvation.² Discernable from the context of 1 John, the Elder uses ‘light’ as a metaphor to reflect God’s flawless perfection, truthfulness, impeccability, and moral goodness. Immediately following the words “God is light,” the author of 1 John clarifies what he means by reminding his readers that in God “there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). The Elder is setting up for his readers a strong contrast between God, who is light, and darkness. As noted by I. Howard Marshall, “The contrast between God and darkness is expressed as strongly as possible. The point is not so much that God did not create darkness but rather that living in darkness is incompatible with fellowship with God. This makes it clear that the writer is thinking of light and darkness predominately in ethical terms.”³

I agree with the Marshall’s basic thrust, but I think there is some need to clarify his point. First, he is right in asserting that the words ‘light’ and ‘dark’ are used “predominately in ethical

¹ Yarbrough provides four reasons for thinking this is the case. First, it has the ring of a summary statement. It is the message that the elder heard “from him” and declares to his readers. Second, the verse comes after four introductory statements, which would seem to indicate, based on positioning, its overall importance. Third, when the elder speaks of the Son, he ipso facto speaks of the Father, since it is the Son who came from the Father and reveals Him to us (a major theme in the Johannine writings Jn 1:1-2, 18; 14:8-11; 1 Jn 1:2-3). Fourth and, perhaps, most critically, the language is deeply rooted in OT theology. Robert W. Yarbrough. 1-3 John. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. 46-47. Similarly, Kruse argues “God is light” “defines the content of his [the elder’s] message . . . which provides basis for the ethical implications the author makes” in the rest of the passage that follows (John 1:6:2:2). Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 60-1.


³ Ibid.
terms.” This becomes clear given certain statements by the Elder which speak of the believer’s having or not having fellowship with God and others. Hating one’s brother results in walking “in the darkness” (1 John 2:9); loving one’s brother results in walking “in the light” (1 John 1:7). Those who walk in the light have fellowship with God and with other believers (1 John 1:7). The confusion may occur in how “light” and “dark” are used with respect to God. The Elder is not saying that God walks in the light, which would have to do with ethics, but that “God is light.” This leads to my second point. When the Elder says that “God is light,” he is making an important ontological claim with respect to God’s nature. Ontologically speaking, “God is light” is reference to God’s perfect moral goodness. The negative that follows, that “there is no darkness at all,” serves to intensify the previous point. In other words, the Elder is saying that God is morally perfect.

There is another important aspect with respect to the proposition “God is light” that needs to be addressed, namely, that ‘light’ also has to do with, in the words of Millard Erickson, God’s “integrity” or “truthfulness.” With respect to truthfulness, Erickson lists three dimensions: “(1)

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4 See James 1:16-18, which is considered to be much earlier text than 1 John, and it, too, provides a deep connection between God’s nature and ethics.

5 For a different perspective, see Daniel L. Akin, 1, 2, 3 John. Nashville (TN: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 65. While I do not disagree with Akin that God is the source of all life, biological and spiritual, it seems to me that Akin’s argument is confused primarily in that his argument depends on the Gospel writer’s use of light in the prologue in order to interpret 1 John. Rather than clearing things up, Akin muddies the waters by equivocating on the way in which the writer of the Gospel of John uses the metaphor of ‘light’ in the prologue and how the Elder uses it in 1 John 1:5 to speak of God’s nature. Akin understands “the Word’s life” as equivalent to “human being’s light” based on the Gospel writer’s declaration, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4, NIV). It is not clear to me, at least, that we can make “life” and “light,” as used in the prologue, equivalents in the sense that Akin wants. While “life” is something that the Word has in Himself, “light” is derivative or the result of the Word’s life. In other words, the metaphor of light, for the Gospel writer, is used in the sense of the Word’s life as revelatory. Its use is primarily epistemological in nature, not ontological. This seems to be made clear by the author’s next statement, “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:5, NIV). In the epistle, the content of the message that the Elder has heard and is passing on is that “God is light.” This is ontological, not epistemological.

6 Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 316.
genuineness—being true; (2) veracity—telling the truth; and (3) faithfulness—proving true.”

That God always tells the truth (veracity)\(^8\) and that God never breaks His promise (faithfulness)\(^9\) are grounded in God’s genuineness.\(^{10}\)

Here we may conclude that the Elder’s reference to God as light contains within it a close connection between God’s perfect moral goodness and his genuineness or integrity, which would also indicate for humans that there is a close connection between moral goodness and truthfulness in character and living. As Yarbrough reminds us, the theme of the epistle, then, “is not dominated first of all by his [the Elder’s] teaching, his commands, or his encouragement to love, or even the occasions that call all these forth”; rather, “It is dominated . . . by his vision of God—God’s light, his moral excellence and efficacious purity.”\(^{11}\) A proper “vision of God” provides for us a proper framework for ethical thinking and living.

The second claim that “God is love” also weighs significantly in the thought of the Elder. As noted with “God is light,” “God is love” is an ontological claim about the very nature of God.\(^{12}\) On the one hand, we must be careful not to mistake function with ontology. The Elder is

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\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that God cannot tell a lie (1 Sam 15:29; Tit 1:2). Moreover, Jesus speaks of God’s word as truth (Jn 17:17).


\(^{10}\) Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 316. Cf. 2 Timothy 2:13. Within the context of 1 John, claiming to have fellowship with God, while walking in the darkness, results in the person lying and not living by the truth. Further, to claim that one is without sin means that one is deceiving oneself and that truth is absent from her life. Yet, walking in the light results in a person’s having fellowship with God and with fellow believers (1 John 1:6-8). Given the contrast, here, it would seem that walking in the light has a quality of being truthful. If walking in the light has within it a quality of being in the truth, then we can assume that God as light involves truthfulness.

\(^{11}\) Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 50.

\(^{12}\) “God is light” and “God is love” are claims about God’s metaphysical nature, and not merely about His character, as Marshall and Kruse seem to imply. See Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 212 and Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 157. I hope to explicate my reasons later on in this chapter. Preliminarily my reason is as follows: if God is triune, then what we have within the divine Trinity is an eternal movement of divine persons toward one another in love. This eternal movement of love is an essential part of God’s nature, and not merely something that God does.
not saying, here, in 1 John 4:8, that God loves; rather, God is love. Yet, on the other hand, it is equally important not to think that love is, in some sense, an abstraction. In Hebraic and Christian thought, God is personal. Love, then, is an essential quality of the nature of the (tri-)personal God. Moreover, “God is love” (as with “God is light”) provides further theological grounding and additional framework for ethical living (1 John 4:7-12).

The reason that the Elder’s readers should love one another is because love “comes from God,” who “is love” in His very essence. Those who love God “know God” and have “been born of God.” Those who do not love do not know God. But what does the Elder mean by “love”? He gives his readers a clue earlier in the epistle when he says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:15, NIV). Jesus, who is God incarnate, exemplifies love in the giving of Himself for others. For this reason, believers are to lay down their lives for one another; loving not merely in word, but by action “in truth” (1 John 3:17-18). God, too, shows His love toward us in that He sent His Son. God sent His Son, not because we loved God, but because of His love for us. “God’s love is,” as Millard Erickson points out, “an unselfish interest in us for our sake.” Similarly, C. S. Lewis speaks of God’s love in the following way: “He can give good, but cannot need or get it. In that sense all His love is, as it

13 I want to be clear that in other passages the Elder does speak of God’s love toward others (1 Jn 3:1; 4:9). My only point is that we cannot conflate “God is love” with “God’s love toward His creatures.” If God is love, His loving actions are a natural result, so this should not be surprising.

14 See 1 John 4:7-12. Yarbrough elaborates on the Elder’s thought: “Love, John seems to be saying, is to be sought, hollowed, nurtured, and guarded simply by virtue of its inherent God-rootedness. . . . In a sense, ‘all things’ are from God (1 Cor. 11:12). But love for John is not merely one among many things finding distinctive rootage in God. It is rather a primary attribute of God. . . . John will go on to state that to fail to love aright is to belie one’s Christian confession (4:20). Love among Christian believers (and, judging from Jesus’s example, love for nonbelievers too) is a nonnegotiable necessity in the household of faith.” Yarbrough, 235.

15 Erickson, Christian Theology, 319.
were, bottomlessly selfless by very definition; it has everything to give and nothing to receive.”

Thus the Elder’s understanding of God as love suggests that in God’s very essence is a sense of selflessness or giving up of one’s self toward the “other.”

“God is love” and “God is light” are two sides of the same proverbial coin. It would seem that the Elder is painting a vision of God which informs how we humans ought to be—a life lived in truth, in harmony with God, and with the other’s best interest in mind. Yet the Elder’s reasoning for our living this way is grounded in the very nature of God. As light, God cannot do anything that is morally evil. As love, God seeks out the best for the “other.” It is God’s moral character that grounds His love, and it is His love that seeks out what is best and good and holy for the “other.” Hence God’s loving actions toward His creatures are always for their best; He cannot do otherwise. His desire is for His creatures to be in fellowship with Him, because He is the source of all that is good, true, and holy.

Since God is light, what God desires for His children is for them to “walk in that light” and to be in fellowship with Him (1 John 1:7). What does walking in light and fellowship with God consist of? First, the Elder reminds us that walking in the light means that we are to be truthful with ourselves. To deny that we have sin in our lives or to claim that we have fellowship with God when we are walking in the darkness causes us to be liars and the truth not in us. When we acknowledge sin in our lives before God, God forgives and purifies us through the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:6-10). Second, one must have true beliefs about God and His Son (1 John 2:22-23; 3:23; 4:2-3; 5:1-5). At face value, this may seem a bit odd. Why must one have true beliefs?

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17 For now, I will leave our discussion on God as love as selflessness toward the other, but I will resume the discussion below.
about God and His Son? A significant aspect of being in the light and having harmony with God is living in truth. To deny truth about the Son results in having a false belief about God. Jerry L. Walls presents a similar argument when speaking of belief in Jesus as necessary for one’s salvation. According to Walls, salvation is “about a perfect relationship with God.” He goes on to argue:

If God is a Trinity and Jesus is God the Son incarnate, as Christians teach, then a perfect relationship with God entails knowing Jesus is God the Son. Not to believe Jesus is God the Son would involve a fundamentally mistaken understanding of God, which would be incompatible with a perfected relationship.

God has given humans revelation about Himself, which is clear about Jesus’ identity as the Son of God. Furthermore, “revelation is sufficiently clear,” says Walls, “that those who have access to it are responsible to believe.” Further, when rejecting Jesus, one is not only rejecting the source of truth (Colossians 2:3; John 14:6), but also the source of all life. Both the Gospel of John and 1 John provide pictures of Jesus as being the source of truth and of life.

Since God is love, believers are to love one another, as noted earlier, with self-giving love. This kind of love looks out for the benefit of the other. Love that is selfless is the same kind of love that God has. The Elder points out that those who fail to love their brothers remain in death (1 John 3:14). Death, here, does not refer to physical death, but it points to a lack of life and of fellowship with God and with others (1 John 2:9; 3:15). Moreover, one cannot claim to

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19 Ibid., 49. See also John 1:14-18, which points to Jesus, who is the “only unique Son,” as being the one who *exegetes* or explains God.

20 Ibid.

21 John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Eternal life—abundant life—is ultimately found in having personal knowledge of God and of the Son.
love God and not love one’s brother. In doing so, that person becomes a liar. Love for God and love for one’s brother are closely connected. Those who love God must also love one’s brother. Yet, the Elder makes it clear that the reason that brothers can love one another is because God first loved us (1 John 1:19-21). It was out of our need that God responded to us. It is not that we initiated it, but only that we responded to it. Receiving God’s love is transformational, for in it, God demonstrates to us what love truly is (1 John 3:16; 4:9). Lastly, believers are to love God above all, doing His will, not loving their own worldly desires, which, as part of the world, pass away (1 John 2:15-17).

Before moving on, it would be helpful to consider what Christians mean by loving one’s neighbor, since the command is potentially ambiguous and often misunderstood. In modern Western culture, love is often associated with an emotion or affection. C. S. Lewis found such an understanding of love inadequate. “Charity means ‘love, in the Christian sense’,,” says Lewis, “But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people.”22 It seems that Lewis is on to something important here. Love cannot be equated merely with an emotion. Based on our study of 1 John, having pity on a brother or sister in need requires also loving through actions “in truth” (1 John 3:17-18). However, one must proceed with caution not to chalk loving one’s neighbor up solely to a matter of the will or to some sort of loving behavior. In 1 Corinthians 13:3, Paul tells us that “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.” Given Paul’s words, love cannot be equated merely with acting in such a manner. One’s inner state is at least

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as important as one’s actions. Francis Howard-Snyder believes that loving one’s neighbor requires, at minimum, some amount of benevolence; however, it cannot be limited to that. She writes,

The second great commandment is like the first. It is fair to assume that the love we owe our neighbor is of the same kind as the love we owe God. Our love for God ought to include an appreciation of him and a desire for union with him, in addition to a desire that his will be done. If our love for our neighbor is to be like the love we owe God, this suggests that the love we have for our neighbors should involve the same elements. Indeed, it makes sense that our love for other people should not be simply benevolence or sheer concern for their well-being, but should also involve desires to be related to them, and an appreciation of what is valuable in them, and enjoyment of them. For if one’s attitude toward others was solely that of benevolence, it would seem that one wouldn’t want anything they have to offer. Sheer benevolence looks like a kind of arrogance, an attitude of independence and inequality vis-à-vis our neighbors.

Similarly, Alexander R. Pruss suggests that biblical concept of love includes three “intertwined aspects.” Not only must one show benevolence, but also an appreciation for and “a striving for union” with the other. Pruss argues that benevolence without appreciation turns toward “a proud and superior philanthropic attitude.” The reason that we pursue union with the other is because of the value that we see in the other. In seeking union with the other, the benefactor becomes not merely the giver of good things, but places herself “on a more equal plane with the beloved, and is vulnerable to being rejected by the beloved.” Yet, the recipient of the goods cannot take the actions of the benefactor for granted. If the benefactor seeks union

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24 Ibid. 387-88.


26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 3.

28 Ibid.
with the other, it breaks down the barrier of the recipient’s feeling shame for being helped. Pruss continues by arguing that appreciation is not enough. Appreciation without union is bankrupt, since a failure to “possess” or to be “joined with the beloved” results in an inability of fully appreciating the other. Lastly, pursuing union and appreciating the other is not enough. One must also seek the other’s good. Failure to do so results in “a self-defeating selfishness.”

Pruss continues,

For genuine union with the other involves pursuit of the other’s goals, and an appreciation of goods is incomplete when it does not motivate us to further those goods. And it is only if, with a mixture of humility and surprised joy, we see our being united with the other as good for the other that we can hope that the other will fully (and not merely by being deceived, say) be joined to us.

Lastly, the expression “love your neighbor as yourself” in Jesus’ command implies an element of self-love. This does not demand, however, that one fall into vanity or nihilism. As C. S. Lewis aptly puts it, love for ourselves “means that we wish our own good.” Further, self-love, suggests Howard-Snyder, should serve for us as a blueprint for how we ought to respond to others. While we often find ourselves having greater love for those we find attractive or find deserving of our love, self-love, on the other hand, is generally not as temperamental. While the object of our focus in self-love may change, say from being upset with some performance or being glad when we do well at some goal, our overall concern, whether being upset or glad, is for our well-being. Sadness and gladness point to that same desire. Further, union with the

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 130.
33 Howard-Snyder, 388.
‘other’ is not merely what’s best for her, but it is also what’s best for the self. Lastly, it is not selfish or wrong to appreciate one’s self. The self’s identity is found in relationship to others. Appreciation for the self, then, is formed through one’s relatedness with others within the community. The self is an important part of the community, which without the community would not be what it is.

The New Testament concept of love, then, is unconditional in nature. Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan exemplifies unconditional love. Unconditional love is an overall attitude and movement toward the other, looking out for the best interest of the other, while also seeking union. It is directed toward all, whether or not the other responds back in the same manner, or even if the other retaliates in hostility or in hurt.

**Trinity, Human Freedom, and Sin**

Not only do Christians affirm with the Elder that God is “light” and “love,” they also hold to the central claim of the Christian faith that God is triune. But why think God triune? What advantage does a triune God have over Unitarian view of God? In response to these questions, J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig put forth the following argument:

1. God is by definition the greatest conceivable being
2. As the greatest conceivable being, God must be perfect
3. A perfect being must be a loving being
4. If God is perfectly loving by his very nature, he must be giving himself in love to another
5. The other cannot be a created person

Therefore
6. The other to whom God’s love is necessarily directed must be internal to God himself

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35 Snyder, 388.

They conclude,

God is not a single, isolated person, as unitarian forms of theism like Islam hold; rather, God is a plurality of persons, as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity affirms. On the unitarian view God is a person who does not give himself away essentially in love for another; he is focused essentially on himself. Hence, he cannot be the most perfect being. But on the Christian view, God is a triad of persons in eternal, self-giving love relationships. Thus, since God is essentially loving, the doctrine of the Trinity is more plausible than any unitarian doctrine of God.37

Perhaps the weakest premise of Moreland and Craig’s argument is (6). Most theists would not doubt that God is the greatest conceivable being, nor would they doubt that God is love and that love belongs to divine perfection. But why think that the object of God’s love cannot be (merely) directed toward something outside of God Himself, say, His creatures? Craig and Moreland respond with the following thought experiment. Creation is a free act of God. God was neither compelled nor caused to create. But we can think of a possible world in which God exists without having created. If love is essential to God’s nature, then God must be perfectly loving. Yet, in such a world, no humans, angels, or other agents exist. Thus created agents cannot sufficiently explain God’s love.

If God is, as Craig and Moreland argue, “a triad of persons in eternal, self-giving love,” then within the triune God is the deepest relationship in all of reality. This relationship—the perichoretic relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—forms the heart of Christian theism. But how are we to understand the doctrine of perichoresis?

basis of these considerations, it is clearly impossible that any one person in the divinity could lack the fellowship of association. If he were to have only one partner, he would not be without anyone with whom he could share the riches of his greatness. However, he would not have anyone with whom he could share the delights of love. There is nothing which gives more pleasure or which delights the soul more than the sweetness of loving. Only someone who has a partner and a loved one in that love that has been shown to him possesses the sweetness of such delights.” See Of the Trinity, in The Christian Theology Reader, 4th edition, ed. Alister E McGrath (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 178.

37 Ibid., 595.
John of Damascus employed the word ‘perichoresis’ in order to describe “the mutual indwelling” or “mutual interpenetration” between the Father, Son, and Spirit. He borrowed the word from Gregory of Nazianus, who used the concept largely in connection to Christology. For John and other Eastern fathers, perichoresis was an important theological concept, which expressed, in the words of Verna Harrison, “the conjunction of unity and distinction, stability and dynamism, symmetry and asymmetry.” They noted that perichoresis gave insight into three key areas: the Trinity, the incarnation, and life in the Kingdom.

In recent years, theologians have rediscovered the importance of perichoresis. Karl Barth describes perichoresis in the following way:

The triunity of God obviously implies, then, the unity of Father, Son and Spirit among themselves. God’s essence is indeed one, and even the different relations of origin do not entail separations. They rather imply—for where there is difference there is also fellowship—a definite participation of each mode of being in the other modes of being, and indeed, since the modes of being are in fact identical with the relations of origin, a complete participation of each mode of being in the other modes of being.

Barth did not like the modern understanding of “person,” that is, an autonomous and isolated individual. As a corrective measure, he preferred the term “mode.” But what is significant

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40 Ibid., 63.

41 Ibid., 63-65.


43 Barth is not buying into the older heretical notion of modalism, as some have falsely misunderstood him. Rather, Barth’s emphasis on ‘modes’ was an attempt to break away from the modern notion of person found in theological liberalism of his time. Barth continues to express differentiation within the Godhead, while continuing to emphasize oneness of essence. The notion of perichoresis is essential to Barth’s understanding of the divine relation within the triune God. However, many modern theologians find Barth’s rejection of the word ‘person’ as unfortunate and his use of ‘mode’ inadequate for bringing about a robust understanding of the Trinity.
about Barth’s notion of perichoresis within the triune God is his emphasis on “fellowship” and “complete participation” among each of the “modes,” or, in the terms of classical Christianity, “persons.”

But how might we understand this complete participation? Here I would like to suggest that at the deepest level of the perichoretic relation is the notion of interpenetrating love between each of the persons of the Trinity. Not only is God one in essence, but God is also one through love toward the other. This is the deepest love possible. It is a love that is active and self-giving; whereby, the Father eternally gives of Himself toward the Son, and the Son eternally gives of Himself toward the Father, and the Spirit eternally gives of Himself toward the Father and the Son.\footnote{The notion of perichoresis, however, is not merely a theological concept, but one that is grounded within the language of scripture. In the Gospel of John, the apostle provides for us glimpse of the internal relationship of God, when he tells us that the “World was with God” (John 1:1). The preposition \textit{pros} could be translated, literally, as “toward.” The expression itself is difficult to translate in the Greek, but roughly has the understanding of “accompaniment and relationship.” Leon Morris, \textit{The Gospel According to John} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 67. According to Andreas Köstenberger, \textit{pros} “indicates a place or accompaniment, but also a disposition and orientation.” This goes beyond mere co-existence to express “active relationship,” or more radically put, “intercourse ‘with’.” Andreas J. Köstenberger, \textit{John} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 25. Not only is John showing that the Word \textit{was} God, but that there is differentiation and movement toward the other within the triune God. John elsewhere records Jesus’ words, indicating, not only His oneness with the Father, but His being “in” the Father. Take the following statement from Jesus, “the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (Jn 10:38; Cf. John 14:20; 17:11, 21-23), or more strikingly, Jesus’ words to Phillip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. . . . Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? . . . Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (Jn 14:7-11). The Father’s presence in Jesus is such that Jesus can declare to His disciples that seeing Him is the same as seeing the Father. J. Scott Horrell, “Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order,” in \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society} 47, no. 3 (Sept 2004), 407. An analogy may be helpful to demonstrate the concept of perichoresis. We can think of three tuning forks that are tuned to the exact pitch. Now imagine placing the tuning forks [say, TFA, TFB, and TFC] in such a way that each can equally penetrate the others, TFA is placed in such a way that it is directed toward TFB and TFC. TFB is placed so that it is directed toward TFA and TFC. Lastly, TFC is placed so that it is directed TFA and TFB. When simultaneously struck, each individual pitch of the tuning forks mutually penetrates the others. On the one hand, the three tuning forks are putting forth distinct sounds, yet, on the other, the pitch from each tuning fork is exactly the same, interpenetrating one another. Now, all analogies break down, and surely this one has its limitations. For instance, tuning forks are not personal kinds of things. Moreover, in order for a tuning fork to work, it needs an agent to strike it for the sound to release. But what’s key is the picture of interpenetration that takes place. Each pitch is distinct, yet unified as they penetrate one another. Here, we may think of each person of the Trinity as distinct (not separated), yet mutually indwelling the other. Each person is open up to, and moving toward, the other in mutual interpenetration.}
Given the doctrine of perichoresis, we can now see how the Elder could proclaim such a statement about God’s nature. God is love is not merely a statement about God’s character, nor is it a statement primarily about how God acts towards His creatures; rather, it is an ontological claim about the very nature of the inner life of the triune God. The very nature of God is such that the three persons of the Trinity exist in eternal self-giving love toward the ‘other’. There is complete indwelling and mutual interpenetration between the persons of the Trinity. As philosopher Stephen T. Davis suggests with respect to perichoresis, “the core of God’s inner being is the highest degree of self-giving love. The Persons are fully open to each other, their actions *ad extra* are actions in common, they ‘see with each other’s eyes’, the boundaries between them are transparent to each other, and each ontologically embraces the other.” At the core of all of existence is a dynamic “loving relationship among persons.”

In creating humans, it may be suggested that, what God wanted to do was to bring about in his creatures what we see in the perichoretic relationship of the divine persons. God wanted to create individuals who could, in a very real sense, be like God, in that they share in the same kind of or similar capacity for, what I shall call, *deep love*, as exemplified within the interpenetrating life of the persons within the tri-unity of God. This deep love is God’s own love. At its heart, deep love is active movement toward the other. It is not the kind of love that is “self-seeking” or “boastful” (1 Cor 13:4-7), nor is it passive sympathetic response; rather, it is self-giving in nature, seeking out union with and what’s best for the other. Human persons, as creatures, then, were created with the ability to relate with and love other persons on the deepest

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levels possible. It is this capacity for deep love and relationality that separates humans from all other created beings.

From a Trinitarian grounding, then, this means that humans not only have certain qualities (structure) like God, and that they are capable of performing certain tasks (function) like Him, but that they are also created to be relational like God. The very notion of relationality like God’s own—relationality that can demonstrate itself in deep love for another—can only be so if the human person is freely capable of being relational, that is, if the person is capable of freely reciprocating or not reciprocating love. Humans, then, who were created in God’s image and likeness, were not only capable of receiving love from God, but also capable of reciprocating such love. As Marilyn Adams suggests, “God made human beings to enter into nonmanipulative relationships of self-surrendering love with himself and relationships of self-giving love with others.”

If humans have the capacity for loving God, then it would also imply that the opposite is true. From the biblical narrative we see that is what happened with humans. Rather than choosing to love God, humans sinned and rebelled against Him. Christians typically define sin as disobedience to or rebellion against God’s law or commands. Sin is surely that, but this definition does not go far enough. It does not capture the nature or essence of just what sin is. At its core, sin is violence and opposed to love. It is violence because, rather than looking out for what’s best for the other, it exalts the self at the expense of the other. All sin, whether intentional or unintentional, brings division, separation, and alienation. It is violent in that it breaks harmony between humans and God, humans and humans, and humans and nature. Thus such a rift finds its

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way throughout all sociological, cultural, and ecological structures. But God does not leave it at that. As Steven Davis suggests:

Cosmically, the relationship between God and human beings was severed by the entrance of sin into the world. Personally, it is broken whenever we separate ourselves from God by sin. All of God’s actions in history are expressions of the personal relationship that is at the center of reality. God is attempting redemptively to restore human beings to the splendor of that relationship. Christians affirm that the relationship is fully restored through the action of God in the world and preeminently through God’s action in Jesus Christ. Its essence is summed up sublimely by the prophet Jeremiah: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Jer 7:23). At the center of the universe is a personal relationship and a God who acts on its behalf.48

According to Christian theism, God’s desire is for humans to have abundant life. The very essence of such life is in knowing God49 and living in accordance to His own being. Yet, because of sin, this life can only come about through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and through the power and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of those who believe. Because of God’s own work in human history, and by means of His own love toward us, humans can be set free from the power, corruption, and effects of sin—such freedom overturns sin that brings about alienation from God, other people, and creation. It is to this Christian hope that we now turn.

**The Kingdom, Creation, Gospel, and Church**

Perhaps there was no other doctrine that Jesus taught on more often than that of the kingdom of God. After John the Baptist’s imprisonment, Jesus began to “proclaim” the “good news of God” (Mk 1:14, NIV). He proclaimed that the “kingdom of God is near” and called for the people to “repent and believe the good news” (Mk 1:15, NIV). Here we see an intricate

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48 Davis, “God’s Action,” 177.

49 John 17:3.
connection between the gospel, “good news” and the nearness of the kingdom of God. But how shall we understand the kingdom of God?

Robert Saucy defines the kingdom of God in the following way: “The Kingdom of God in Scripture is the all-embracing program of God’s divine salvation history. All ages, peoples, and saving activities are in some way related to it.”50 Yet, for Saucy, the concept of the kingdom is much broader. He explains it as follows:

Involved in the term kingdom (basileia) are both the sovereignty or royal dignity of a king, and the realm or territory in which the kingship is exercised. The kingdom of God thus refers to the sovereign rule of God over His creation. Although there is, in the ultimate sense, one kingdom of God, the Scripture uses this term for two distinct aspects of this kingdom. On the one hand, it signifies God’s universal, eternal rule over all creation. . . . On the other hand it refers to the eschatological Messianic kingdom which is to be established in history, which Christ announced as at hand, and for which He taught His disciples to pray. While the first kingdom is ruled directly by God, the second aspect is founded upon the covenant promises and ruled through the God-Man, Jesus Christ, the Seed of David.51

Given Saucy’s understanding of the kingdom, God’s rule is, on the one hand, over all of creation. Consider the Lord’s Prayer. In this prayer that Jesus gave to the disciples, he instructed them to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10, ESV). It is possible to understand the “your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” clause as subordinate

50 Robert L. Saucy, The Church in God's Program (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972), 83. It is unclear why Saucy’s definition only concerns salvation history. As noted below, especially in regards to the aspect of God’s universal kingdom, God’s rule expands beyond our space-time universe, even to the heavenly realm. This invites an important question. To what extent does salvation history, within our space-time universe, affect the heavenly realm or beings such as angels, if at all? Unfortunately, while the Bible does speak on heaven and angels, very little is given to us in regards to the effects of salvation history on these two aspects of God’s universal rule. As 1 Peter 1:12, in regards to our salvation, that “[e]ven angels long to look into these things” (NIV).

51 Ibid; Charles C. Ryrie makes a distinction between four different “kingdoms” within the biblical text: the universal kingdom; the Davidic/messianic kingdom; the mystery form of the kingdom; and the spiritual kingdom. While these distinctions are helpful, one must wonder if it is necessary to make each distinction a separate kingdom. [See Charles C. Ryrie, Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 460-461.] Perhaps it may be clearer to understand, as Saucy does, each of the so-called “kingdoms” as various aspects of the already/not yet kingdom of God, which is encompassed by the universal rule of God. For example, Richard Bauckham argues persuasively that Jesus is currently on the cosmic throne, something that was unheard of in Judaism. See Richard Bauckham, Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 152-181.
to the “Your kingdom come” clause.\textsuperscript{52} If that is the case, then Jesus is making a direct link between God’s will and the kingdom of God, that is to say, the coming of the kingdom on earth as in heaven is an expression of the will of God. The implication of this interpretation of Matthew 6:10 is that God’s kingdom rule extends and includes both heaven and earth. There are, in addition, various other depictions within Scripture which would lead one to conclude that the kingdom is broader in scope than to humans and the created space-time universe. For example, in 1 Chronicles 29:11, we are told that God’s dominion extends both to heaven and earth:

“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all” (NASB). Psalm 145: 13 informs us of the everlasting nature of God’s kingdom and dominion. God’s dominion, says the psalmist, “endures throughout all generations.” Thus God’s rule is not limited merely to future generations, but throughout the entire creation history.

For theologian Stanley Grenz, one cannot properly understand the concept of kingdom apart from the concept of community:

From the narratives of the primordial garden which open the curtain on the biblical story to the vision of white-robed multitudes inhabiting the new earth with which it concludes, the drama of the Scriptures speaks of community. Taken as a whole the Bible asserts that God’s program is directed to the bringing into being of community in the highest sense—a reconciled people, living within a renewed creation, and enjoying the presence of their Redeemer . . . The concept of community fills the idea of the kingdom of God with its proper content. When God’s rule is present—when God’s will is done—community emerges. Or viewed from the opposite direction, in the emergence of community, God’s rule is present and God’s will is accomplished.\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{53} Stanley J. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 24. In the context of this passage, Grenz takes the concept of community, along with the kingdom of God, as his chief theological motif for his systematic expression of theology.
Grenz defines the kingdom, quite simply, as the “divine reign.” But what does such a reign look like? Having surveyed the biblical material and current debate on the various issues revolving around the biblical understanding of kingdom, Grenz makes a helpful distinction between de jure (in principle) and de facto (in fact) rulership. Out of principle God is the ruler of all things. This right is His because He is the creator of all things. “Consequently,” says Grenz, “the entire universe is the kingdom of God or the realm of God’s dominion de jure.” Yet, as one considers the biblical data, “what is true de jure is not yet fully true de facto.” The reason for this stems from the God-given human capacity to respond to God’s rule. Thus because of our sin and rejection of the Creator king, “we have erected an enclave of rebellion in which another – Satan – appears to reign. As a creature, this de facto ruler is a usurper, for he does not possess the right to rule that is God’s alone.”

On the one hand, the kingdom is already here, but only in part. “The divine reign,” explains Grenz, “is related to Christ’s first advent.” Furthermore, it is a reality that people can enter (Mark 9:47; Matt. 21:31-32), for it is the kingly power of God. Hence, the kingdom is a “sphere of existence” in which people are called to live. It is incorporation into God’s powerful invasion of our world. As such it consists in doing the will of God (Matt. 6:10; 7:21-23), and it demands a radical decision (13:44-46).

There remains a future eschatological aspect to the kingdom connected to Christ’s Second Advent. With the second coming of Christ “all creation will be brought into conformity with the

54 Ibid., 472.
55 Ibid., 476.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
It is only then that the earth will be in conformity to God’s will as it is in heaven.

Grenz’s analysis of the kingdom is helpful for several reasons. First, much like Saucy’s definition, it encompasses the whole of creation (heaven and earth). By defining God’s kingdom as the “divine reign,” Grenz properly gives consideration both to the cosmic reign of God and the future aspect of His reign that occurs at the second coming of Christ. But he also recognizes God’s reign exists apart from salvation history (e.g., God’s reign over heaven), without neglecting the important role that redemption has in both the present and future aspects of the eschatological aspect of the kingdom. Second, Grenz’s emphasis on community is helpful. As Grenz rightly notes, stress on community helps to divert radical individualism. Moreover, as will be expressed below, the inclusion of community into the kingdom motif fits with a proper reflection on creation (and re-creation).

In the creation account we find that God created the entire space-time universe (Gen 1:1; cf. Jn 1:1-3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:2-3), and that on the sixth day He created humans in his “image” according to His “likeness” (v.26-27). In this passage we see clearly that God gave to humans the task of taking care of and ruling over his good creation. Humans were God’s vice-regents, ruling over the creation under God’s authority. On the one hand, as God’s vice-regents, they were to serve the creation, to take care of it, and to watch and care for it (Gen 2:15, 19-20; Ps 8:6). Yet, on the other hand, the creation is something that was (and is) to be enjoyed (Gen

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59 Ibid.

60 Saucy provides a helpful analysis of the already/not yet nature of the Kingdom as he works through Christ’s teaching in the parables on the presence of the kingdom. He argues that Jesus placed emphasis on the spiritual, hidden nature of the kingdom (Mk 4:26-29; Mt 13:19). Yet, Jesus also emphasized the future manifestation of the kindom (e.g., the parables of the mustard seed and leaven). Lastly, Jesus spoke often of the present work of the kingdom as God’s sovereign work. See Robert L. Saucy, “The Presence of the Kingdom and the Life of the Church,” Bibliotheca Sacra (January-March 1988), 37-38.
2:9; cf. Jer 2:7; 31:5; 1 Tim 6:17; Eccl 9:9). As God’s image bearers, humans were to be “like” God, as His representatives to the creation.

The first humans were one aspect of God’s overall reign and universal kingdom. They were to participate in God’s universal kingdom, which includes, not only His divine authority ruling over all of creation, but also, such a rule which included, at its core, all that is good, pure, and beautiful. The creation itself is a product of God’s own love and grace, by which he allows something other than Himself to exist and to have life. In creating, God shares life with something other than Himself. As the giver of life, the kingdom of God is a kingdom of life, by which God shares that which is central to his own life, that is, all that is good, pure, and beautiful, apart from any corruption. Within the intra-trinitarian relationship we find a dynamic relationship between each of the persons of the Tri-une God, and that God, in making a world like ours, decided to share His own life with His creatures.

Because of sin humans are estranged from God, one another, and the creation. They are in need of redemption, that is to say, they need to be brought back into right relationship with God, one another, and creation. This is the great message of the gospel. Not only does God offer forgiveness of sin, but he also offers new life through the finished work of Jesus and through the empowering by the Holy Spirit. But how are we to understand the nature of the gospel, especially in relation to the kingdom of God?

Christians often have a limited view of the gospel. As Darrell Bock rightly points out, too often Christians see the gospel as being a “transaction” of sorts and miss the full meaning and ramifications of all that the gospel entails.\textsuperscript{61} Central to the gospel is the cross of Christ (1

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Corinthians 1:23; 15:3-5). It is the core of the good news; however, that is not the full message of the gospel. As Bock relays,

> When Paul refers to the cross in this early part of 1 Corinthians, the term *cross* functions as the hub and a synecdoche for all that Jesus’ work brings. A synecdoche is a part that represents the whole. I mention one central thing to picture all of it. For example, if I speak of the Law and the Prophets, I am speaking of the whole Old Testament. If I speak of fifty head of cattle, I’m talking about fifty whole cows—heads, hooves, bodies, and tails—not just fifty heads. Likewise, when Paul speaks of the cross here [in 1 Corinthians 1:23], he is using the word as a synecdoche for the whole of the gospel.\(^{62}\)

Bock further notes that the gospel began with a promise of new life, and this new life is brought about through the giving of the promised Holy Spirit. In Genesis 12:1-3 God made a promise to Abraham that He would make him a great nation and that all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through Him. God’s faithfulness to His creation begins with the Abrahamic covenant and continues through the Davidic and New Covenants.\(^{63}\)

There are several central themes that come out in each of these covenants. As noted, in the Abrahamic covenant, God promised Abraham that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through him. In the Davidic covenant, God promised David an ancestor and a throne that would last forever. In the New Covenant God promised that He would bring about renewal to His people (Jer 31:31-34). Similarly, in the book of Ezekiel, God promises to “cleanse” His people from all their “filthiness,” to give them a “new heart and put a new spirit” within them, and to remove their “heart of stone,” giving them “a heart of flesh.” He will then put His “Spirit” within them and “cause” them “to walk” according to God’s “statutes” (Ezek 36:25-28, NASB).

We see from these two passages an emphasis on God’s renewal in two ways, first through cleansing and making His people clean, removing their hearts of stone, and, second, through

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\(^{62}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 10.
writing His law upon their hearts, giving them a heart of flesh, and putting His Spirit within them.

The promise of the forgiveness of sins and the coming of the Holy Spirit is what we see fulfilled through the finished work of Jesus in the Gospels and Acts, and thus mirrors the two works of Christ, His death on the cross for forgiveness of sins and His resurrection, which is a foreshadowing of our own resurrection. In Luke 3:16, John the Baptist proclaims that “One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (NASB). Furthermore, in Luke 24:49, Jesus tells his disciples that the Scriptures predicted “that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead on the third day,” and that “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (NASB). In the book of Acts, the giving of the forgiveness of sins and the promised Holy Spirit is a continual theme throughout the various proclamations. In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells his disciples that they are to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit; when they do they will “receive power.” On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were given the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-13). This fulfilled the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 that God would “pour forth” His “Spirit on all mankind” (NASB), the same Spirit give to the Gentiles, as shown later throughout Acts (Acts 10:47; 15:7-8). As Bock points out, the first gospel message presented in Acts, not only included mention of the forgiveness of sins, but also the promise of “the reception of the Spirit of God, the reception of a promise God had made to enable His people.”

The effects of the gospel are not limited, however, to human redemption, but also entails God’s saving work throughout all of creation, which is mirrored in Christ’s resurrection. God’s

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64 Ibid., 17. [Emphasis his]
plan includes reconciling creation to Himself, as noted in Colossians 1:20, “and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (ESV). Similarly, in the book of Romans, Paul connects directly the redemption of the creation with human redemption. The creation itself “waits in eager longing” and “has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth” (Rom 8:19, 22, ESV). Yet, as Paul notes, we have been given the “first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:23, ESV). It is unclear exactly what Paul means by this. Within the context, Paul contrasts the life lived in the flesh with the life lived in the Spirit. Believers are “in the Spirit” and the Spirit indwells them (Rom 8:9, 11). Those living according to the Spirit, and not the flesh, “set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5), which results in “life and peace” (Rom 8:6, ESV). Furthermore, it is the Spirit who raised Christ and who gives those who are in Christ life (Rom 8:11). Given the context, it would seem that Paul is indicating that creation, too, will one day receive the effects of the Spirit’s work just as those who are in Christ are now experiencing His work and are indwelt by Him. Interestingly enough, the book of Revelation gives a glimpse of the renewed creation, which includes language which speaks of God dwelling among His people:

2Then I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”5 And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” (Rev 21:2-5, NASB)

Note that God Himself will “tabernacle,” “dwell,” and “be among them.” Interestingly enough, this language is strikingly similar to the language found in the Gospel of John, when the Gospel writer speaks of Jesus’ incarnation, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we
saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father” (Jn 1:14, NASB). Millard Erickson captures well the essence of the incarnational language:

The most amazing assertion is that “the Word became flesh” (1:14). The reference is not to some timeless occurrence, but to a specific event at a definite point in history. Note that John does not say that the Word “appeared as” or “showed himself in” flesh, but that he actually “became” flesh. That this was not only a definite historical occurrence but a continuing fact is seen in the phrase “and dwelt among us” (v.14). The term is a strong one, which literally means “tabernacled among us” or “pitched his tent among us.” It conveys the idea of a lengthy period of residence rather than a temporary visit.65

While there is some parallel between Revelation 21:2-5 and John 1:14, it must be made clear, however, that there is one central difference. In the incarnation the Son of God became flesh. Scripture is not speaking of God adding creation to Himself, as the Son of God added a human nature in the incarnation. Nevertheless, what we do see taking place in the eschaton is something radical—God himself will dwell among His people. It is unclear how exactly this will take place. Several places in Scripture speak of the impossibility of humans seeing God. In John 1:18 the text says that no one has “seen God at any time” except for the Son who was at the Father’s side. In a similar vein, Paul tells his readers that God alone “possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Tim 6:16, NASB). If my assessment of Romans 8:23 is correct, perhaps, then, it is the Spirit, the same divine person of the Trinity working in and indwelling us, who will be the one who indwells creation. At the very least, it is the Spirit, who is the agent of re-creation, who will be involved in not only our own redemption and renewal, but the renewal of all creation.66


66 Though, indeed, this could be a reference to the incarnate Son of God who will dwell among us again “in the flesh” in the New heavens and earth. While the Spirit indwells us and is the agent of renewal of God’s good creation, the Son of God, too, will be in our midst. Both the Son and the Spirit will be present in the eschatological culmination of God’s kingdom.
Lastly, we find similar language regarding God’s cosmic plan for redemption employed in the book of Ephesians. Yet the language is intricately connected to the mission of church. Howard A. Snyder defines the church as, “The community of God’s people—a people called to serve God and called to live together in true Christian community as a witness to the character and virtues of God’s reign.”\(^67\) As Snyder further reminds us (and as we saw in the previous section), God is about saving souls; however, such a definition of the gospel is much too narrow. The church’s mission is much broader than that.\(^68\)

According to Snyder, the mission of the church “is nothing other than bringing all things and, supremely, all people on earth under the dominion and headship of Jesus Christ.”\(^69\) As Snyder reminds us, in the book of Ephesians we catch a glimpse of the church’s role in God’s cosmic plan. In Ephesians 1:7-10 Paul expresses that,

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\text{in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ. (NIV)}
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God’s plan is, in the words of Snyder, “that God may glorify himself by uniting all things in Christ.”\(^70\) The biblical vision is that of the whole creation as coming together to worship God, and hence, the key concept is that of reconciliation. As expressed by Snyder, “God’s plan is for the restoration of his creation, for overcoming, in judgment and glorious fulfillment, the damage

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\(^68\) Ibid., 62.

\(^69\) Snyder, 13.

\(^70\) Ibid., 64.
done to persons and nature through the Fall.”71 This plan took place before “the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4, NASB). God is reconciling all things to Himself, not just humans, but all of creation (Eph 1:10; Col 1:20; Rom 8:18-23; Rev 21:1-5). It is the restoration of all things to his original intentions that will finally be brought about through the eschatological coming of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The church’s role, then, is to be a part of God’s plan for reconciliation. As Paul expresses in his second letter to the Corinthians, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has given to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19, NASB). Therefore, those who belong to the church are to be “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:20, NASB), and thus, ministers of reconciliation.

Before moving on, it should be noted that there is another relation between the kingdom of God and the church, namely, the church is a glimpse of what is to come. Those who have been reconciled to Christ have been given the “first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:23, NASB). They are “in Christ” through the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that brings new life, and it is only through the empowering of the Holy Spirit that the church can fulfill its mission of reconciliation. Jürgen Moltmann captures this rather clearly, in his seminal work, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*:

The church as the community of justified sinners, the fellowship of those liberated by Christ, who experience salvation and live in thanksgiving, is on the way to fulfilling the meaning of the history of Christ. With its eyes fixed on Christ, it lives in the Holy Spirit and thus is itself the beginning and earnest of the future of the new creation. It proclaims Christ alone, but the fact that it proclaims him is already the advent of the future of God in the word. It believes Christ alone; but the fact that it believes is already the sign of hope. In its liberation it follows Christ alone; but this is already the bodily anticipation of the redemption of the body. In the Lord’s supper it remembers and makes present the death of Christ, which leads to life; but the fact that this happens is a foretaste of the peace to come. It only confesses Jesus, the crucified, as Lord; but the kingdom of God is anticipated in this confession. This relationship between what happens and the fact that it happens can only be understood pneumatologically. The community and fellowship of Christ which is the church comes

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71 Ibid.
about ‘in the Holy Spirit’. The Spirit is this fellowship. Faith perceives God in Christ and this perception itself the power of the Spirit.  

In this passage, Moltmann captures the already/not yet aspect of the kingdom. It is the church “in” God’s kingdom that stands in tension and hope between the current indwelling and empowering of the Spirit, the abundant life that only God can provide, and the final eschatological promise of reconciling all things to God and making all things new in heaven and on earth.

**Theosis and the Kingdom of God**

Having given consideration to the relationship between the kingdom of God, creation, the gospel, and the church, I now turn to the Eastern Orthodox teaching of *theosis*. What relation does this ancient doctrine bear to God’s original intentions for His creation and the kingdom, and what are the implications for the church today, if any at all? I begin by sketching a brief theological and biblical view of the doctrine, stressing the work of Irenaeus and Athanasius, followed by an examination of the doctrine of *theosis* as connected to God’s work in the reconciliation of “all things.”

In its basic understanding, *theosis* means “deification” or “becoming God.” The first historical Christian expression of the doctrine is found in Irenaeus’s *Against Heresies*. Here Irenaeus expresses that no one else could obtain the throne of David other than Jesus Christ. He was the one whom God “promised by the law and the prophets that He would make His salvation visible to all flesh; so that He would become the Son of man for this purpose, that man also

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might become the son of God.”\textsuperscript{74} The reason for the incarnation was for the redemption of our human nature. The Word became flesh so that “He might win back to God that human nature (\textit{hominem}) which had departed from God.”\textsuperscript{75} Similarly, humanity could not have learned the ways of God apart from the Word becoming man.\textsuperscript{76} The incarnation ultimately brought about our union with God:

Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God.\textsuperscript{77}

It was through incarnation that Christ took upon our human nature, giving up both soul and body for our behalf. It is by the blood of the Lord that humans are redeemed. In so becoming incarnate we receive “immortality.” We should note, too, the significant connection between Christ’s work and the work of the Spirit. As noted, in giving us the Holy Spirit humans receive God, and, thus share in “union and communion” with God.

We also see the doctrine of \textit{theosis} expressed in the thought of Athanasius. Central to Athanasius’s doctrine of \textit{theosis} is his anthropology. Like many of the Greek Fathers, he made a clear distinction made between the Creator and the creature, but such a distinction did not result in a disjunctive dualism. The Creator alone is immortal, eternal, and incorruptible. All that exists was created out of nothing, unlike the Platonic doctrine that saw the artificer as forming the universe out of some kind of pre-existing and uncreated matter.\textsuperscript{78} In the same way, humanity was

\textsuperscript{74} Irenaeus, \textit{Against Heresies}, 3.10.2.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 5.1.1.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78} Athanasius, \textit{On the Incarnation}, 1.2.
created out of “non-existence.” God is the giver of life, and humans were created in a state of innocence, that is, a state of “incorruption.” Athanasius saw evil as “non-being, the negation and antithesis of good,” and thus, turning away from God, humanity became corrupted and, as a result, they were “in process of becoming corrupted entirely.” It was the Word who “had called them into being,” but through rebellion they “lost the knowledge of God,” and “they lost existence with it.” The reason for sending the Word, says Athanasius, “was for our sorry case.”

The beauty of the incarnation is that the very God who brought all things into existence, and who fashioned the very body in the virgin that he would take on, died on our behalf through His great love for us:

Thus taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished because, having fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was thereafter voided of its power for men. This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.

Toward the end of his work on the incarnation of the Word of God, Athanasius says something surprising and startling: that the Word “assumed humanity that we might become God.” This may sound strange to our modern ears, but it was a common thought among the Greeks of Athanasius’s time. His readers would have understood the implications. According to

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79 Ibid., 1.4.

80 Ibid., 1.4.

81 Ibid., 2.9.

82 Ibid., 8.54. cf. Athanasius, Letter 60, to Adalphius, 4 “For He has become Man, that He might deify us in Himself, and He has been born of a woman, and begotten of a Virgin, in order to transfer to Himself our erring generation, and that we may become henceforth a holy race, and ‘partakers of the Divine Nature,’ as blessed Peter wrote.” Also, Against the Arians, 2.59.
Athanasius, the Son took on our human nature that we might “perceive the Mind of the unseen Father” and that He “endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality.” 83 In so doing, He did not cease being who He was, that is, He remained “impassible and incorruptible” in His divine nature; nevertheless, it was through His impassibility “He kept and healed the suffering men on whose account He thus endured.” 84

We see the thread of theosis throughout other Fathers, particularly in the works of Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, and Maximus the Confessor. 85 The Fathers never understood theosis to mean that humans become God in some ontological sense. Only the Triune God is a se, eternal, and without generation. In becoming deified, humans never cease being what they are; rather, they are transformed and are, thus, fulfilled in their humanity. While they were created “sinless,” there was always the possibility of corruption. In the eschaton, humans will be transformed and brought into a state of “maturity and perfection through the regenerative grace of God and become not only sinless but also incapable anymore of falling into sin.” 86

83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.


86 Kharlamov, “Theosis in Patristic Thought,” 166.
According to Eastern Orthodox thinkers, there are key Scriptures which point to the doctrine of *theosis* (2 Pet 1:4; Ps 82:6; and John 10:34-35; 17:21-23). Perhaps the strongest passage is 2 Peter 1:4, which informs us that believers, through God’s promise, “may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (NASB). Because of their becoming “partakers of the divine nature” and because they have “escaped corruption,” believers are to apply diligence “in” their “faith,” adding spiritual qualities, which include, “moral excellence,” “knowledge,” “self-control,” “perseverance,” “godliness,” “brotherly kindness,” and “love” (2 Pet 1:5-7, NASB). These qualities should belong in the life of believers and they should be “increasing” (2 Pet 1:8, NASB). When a believer lacks such qualities, he is “blind” and has “forgotten his purification from his former sins” (2 Peter 1:9, NASB). Note the comparison between “having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” and having received “purification.” Thus believers have been purified and are to practice such qualities, that is, such qualities that are consistent with becoming “partakers of the divine nature.” Believers are capable of such qualities because God’s “divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3, NASB). And, in so doing, believers are being like God, “who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Pet 1:3, NASB).

Another significant passage is John 17, where Jesus prays that all those whom He has been given by the Father “may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. . . . I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved

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them, even as you have loved Me” (Jn 17:21, 23, NASB). This unity that Jesus prays for is a unity that He and the Father share, and, yet, it seems that in some way believers will also be “in” both the Father and Son. This instance in John 17 is not, however, an anomalous thought in the New Testament. Similarly, throughout the Pauline epistles Christians are said to be “in Christ” or that Christ is “in” believers. 2 Corinthians 5:15-21, which I touched on earlier, states that the reason Christ died was “so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Cor 5:15, NASB). In verses 16-17, Paul goes on to reiterate that we do not know anyone according to the flesh, but rather, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:17, NASB). Those who are in Christ have been changed, they are a new creature, and are thus to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor 15:18-20). In verse 21, Paul tells the Corinthians that God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Thus we are given reconciliation to God so that we may be like God, that is, to “become the righteousness of God.” This takes place “in” Christ. This “in” language occurs in other places throughout the Pauline corpus (Eph 1:3-4, 26; 2:10; 4:12-16; 5:23-32; Col 1:27; Gal 2:20). 88 Furthermore Christ is the true “image” of the Father (Col 1:15-18), and Christians are to be renewed in the image of God (Eph 3:16-19; 4:13-15). 89

What, then, is the connection between theosis, the church, and the kingdom of God? As noted, there is a distinction between the church and the kingdom of God. Moreover, the church’s mission is to share in the ministry of reconciliation, taking the “good news” of Christ to the

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89 Rakestraw, 258.
world, and being a part of what God is doing to reconcile all things to Himself. Central to the gospel message is Jesus’ death and resurrection. It was Jesus’ death that secured for us our salvation, and it was his resurrection which points to our future renewal, yet there is a sense in which we experience our future reality now, especially when Paul iterates to us that we are the “first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:23, NASB). We enter into this salvation by grace through faith because of the finished work of Christ (Eph 2:8-9). Believers are said to be justified (Rom 4:3, 16; 5:1); adopted as sons and daughters (Rom 5:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5); sanctified (1 Cor 1:2); washed, regenerated, and renewed by the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5); and given the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:6) as a deposit and guarantee of our future redemption (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30). It is the Holy Spirit who brings life and works in us (sanctification) to bring about people who are transformed, and who are to be workers for the kingdom. Paul tells the church in the letter to the Ephesians that believers have working in them God’s “incomparably great power . . . like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” (Eph 1:19-20, NIV).

Further, in the initial creation we find God’s good intentions for his creatures, that is, that they were to share in life, which reflects his own beauty and goodness. Yet, because of sin, our human ancestors brought about disunity between them and God, one another, and the creation. God is working to bring about harmony and reconciliation—the effects of the gospel in its wider context. The doctrine of theosis, when understood properly, refers to the entire context of human salvation and reconciliation, not merely of our justification, but also in regards to our sanctification—the part of our salvation where believers are called to “work out,” through the gift and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and through God who works in them (Phil 2:12-13,
Further, *theosis* refers to the believer’s glorification, where she is finally and completely made new, free from sin, and brought into full union with God and creation.

Emphasis on *theosis* does not entail either pantheism or panentheism. There is no ontological union with God where a blending between natures takes place. God remains who He is and humans remain what they are. Perhaps we may understand *theosis*, like Myk Habets suggests, as “the re-creation of our lost humanity in the dynamic, atoning interaction between the divine and human natures within the one person of Jesus Christ, through whom we enter into the triune communion of God’s intra-trinitarian life.”

It is through Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit that humans participate in God. As Habets clarifies, this union is a “thoroughly personal and relational experiencing of the triune relations.” Ultimately, *theosis* is the bringing about of God’s original intentions for humans from the beginning, the capacity to share in the life of God, but not only that, to obtain ultimate human fulfillment. It points to our future hope and to the new creation, where humans will fully receive their final redemption, and ultimately obtain human fulfillment. Yet, this is not something that believers wait for in the eschaton. It begins now through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, who works in us to bring us into a right relationship with God, and who also gives believers the energy and ability to live out Christian lives. Furthermore, the doctrine of *theosis* helps to redirect the proclamation of the Christian gospel. There is no doubt that Scripture expresses God’s wrath against sin and the sinner. Nevertheless, there is much more to the proclamation of God’s love, the gospel, and salvation than this. Again, in the words of Habets, “The ultimate goal of salvation is no longer to appease the wrath of an angry God but to attain to participation in the divine life through the Son by the

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91 Ibid., 494.
Holy Spirit. This still necessitates judgment on sin and justification of the sinner, but it does not end there.\textsuperscript{92} The church can begin to preach a gospel which reflects “good news,” that is, a gospel grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which brings hope of new life to a lost and dying world.

**Concluding Thoughts**

I began this chapter by giving consideration to how the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly the perichoretic interpenetrating relationship among the divine persons, impacts a variety of other Christian doctrines. Not only is the doctrine of the Trinity essential to Christian theology, but, as I will show in the next chapter, it is central in mounting a theodicy.

Finally, when we reflect on each of the above themes—the kingdom, creation, gospel, and *theosis*—we see that God is doing something radical in the world. According to Christian theology, He is bringing about a world in which His everlasting kingdom will reign supreme. This kingdom resembles the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity. There is a sense in which God’s human creatures are taken into the divine relationship through divine activity, though we must be careful here and recognize that there is some mystery to it. God and His creatures become one in union, though this union is not ontological. Furthermore, it is not that God’s creatures penetrate God, as we see in the interpenetration of the divine persons of the Trinity. Rather, the penetration seems one way. God, through God’s dynamic working and movement, and through God’s indwelling Spirit, will bring about a world by which His presence will penetrate all of creation in such a way that His divine beauty, goodness, and radiance will fill all of creation. This, we may call, the *perichoretic kingdom.*

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 496-497.
In this chapter, I will attempt to bring together all that I have argued thus far by means of a theodicy. I begin by sketching out three theodicies that have been suggested by Christians. I will attempt to show the limitations of such theodicies, while recognizing that some, more so than others, have their own merit and should be worked into an overall theodicy. I will then move on to formulate a proposed theodicy grounded in the perichoretic relationship of the divine Trinity, which I have dubbed the “Trinitarian Perichoretic Theodicy” (TPT). But one further point must be considered, which I will tackle in the conclusion of this chapter.

Any adequate theodicy must not only answer why God allows for the amount, types, and kinds of evil that He does, but it must also answer the existential question of evil. While no doubt the problem of evil has its share of philosophical and theological difficulties, I believe at the heart of the issue of evil is the question: If God exists, what is He doing about all of the evil in the world? This is an existential or religious question as much as it is a theological and philosophical one. This question has been the motivation and drive behind this present work. When people ask questions such as Why does God allow X?, they often do not see God at work. After all, if God were working, then X would not have occurred. Providing justifying reasons for why God allows evil in the world is only part of the equation. They also want to see that God has not abandoned us and that He is really doing something to stop evil in this world. It is to these two questions—the “why” and the “what”—that I now turn. It is my contention that TPT provides not only an adequate justifying reason for why God allows evil in the world and redeem those sufferings already experienced, but also gives a parameter and framework for thinking about an adequate response to the religious or existential problem from evil.
Theodical Suggestions

In what follows I work through three theodicies often proposed by Christians to justify God’s reasoning for allowing evil in the world. While each has its own merits, there are certain limitations of each theodicy. Despite such limitations, we should not jettison them entirely. Rather, each provides important angles for thinking through an adequate response to why God allows evil in the world.

Freewill Theodicy

I begin by discussing, perhaps, the most popular response to why God allows evil in the world—the Freewill theodicy.¹ Before moving on to the main line of argument, it would be helpful to consider what it means to say that a creature is free.

A creature is significantly free if, say, given a choice between two morally significant actions $x$ and $y$, it has the capacity to make such a choice, without thereby being determined or forced into performing one action over the other,² or as Plantinga puts it, “no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action, or that he won’t.”³ If a creature is significantly free, not even God can bring it about that the agent chooses one action

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¹ The Freewill theodicy was first proposed by Augustine, but has been adapted over the years by various theologians and philosophers. Perhaps the clearest expression is put forward by Alvin Plantinga. It should be noted, however, that Plantinga’s own version is not a theodicy; rather, it is a defense. A theodicy, according to Plantinga, seeks to show God’s reason for allowing certain evils. A defense, on the other hand, is much more modest in what it claims. It does not attempt to show why God allows evil; rather, it only attempts to show that there is no inconsistency between God’s existence and evil in the world. While I recognize the difference between a defense and a theodicy, I am concerned more with understanding it as a theodicy for the purposes of this chapter, since I do recognize in formulating a fuller theodicy that the notion of libertarian freedom is a central feature of God’s reason for allowing certain kinds of evil in the world. For a fuller discussion of the difference between a theodicy and defense, see Alvin Plantinga, God, Freedom, and Evil (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 28-29.


³ Plantinga, God, Freedom, and Evil, 29.
over the other. Now that an understanding of what I mean by “freewill” has been given, an exposition of the Freewill theodicy will follow.

According to the Freewill theodicy, among those possible worlds that God could have created, a world in which significantly free creatures exist would be more valuable than a world without such creatures. But if God creates a world in which creatures have the capacity for moral good, then it must also be the case that such creatures have the capacity for moral evil. Given such a capacity to perform morally significant actions, some of those creatures rebelled against God. As many theists will argue, creaturely free agency is the cause of moral evil in the world.

Some atheologists, however, find such a theistic response deficient on several fronts. I shall consider three. First, the atheologist may argue that the Freewill theodicy, while it answers the problem of moral evil, says nothing about natural evil. This objection, however, may be a bit premature. Some have argued that even so-called natural evils are, in actuality, the result of the moral choices of God’s free creatures, specifically powerful beings that rebelled against God and that seek to wreak havoc on God’s good creation. So, in the end, all evils that occur are ultimately moral. Not everyone, however, is keen on holding fallen angels responsible for natural evil. For instance, Richard Swinburne and Peter Harrison find the suggestion that angelic beings are behind natural evils ad hoc, and caution against such a view. While I can sympathize

4 Van Inwagen, “The Argument from Evil,” 64.

5 Plantinga, God, Freedom, and Evil, 30.

6 See Alvin Plantinga, God, Freedom, and Evil, 59-64; Gregory Boyd has constructed a defense of what he calls the “Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy.” In this theodicy, natural evils in large part fall on the actions of free agents, particularly demonic agents—chiefly Satan—who have power to destroy, manipulate creation, and cause much harm. But Boyd would argue that Satan is not sufficient to explain natural evil. Gregory Boyd, Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 17-18, 29-49.

with Swinburne and Harrison’s fear, it is not at all implausible, given that an omnipotent being exists, and when taken into connection with the data that we view from our own world, such as the great variety and complexity of creatures that we observe. Could God not have created beings that are equally or more powerful than we are, yet creatures that are very much like the kind we find in the Bible, who seek to ruin God’s good creation? Perhaps if such creatures are as powerful as described in the Bible, they could be behind much of the goings on of evil in nature. So, at least these powerful beings could stand behind some of the natural evils in the world. So, one cannot fully rule out the Freewill theodicy as a partial response to natural evils. But like Swinburne and Harrison, the atheologian may not be satisfied. So, in this sense, the Freewill theodicy is limited.⁸

The second objection centers on whether God could have made free creatures in such a way that they would always freely perform morally good actions. Or at least, could not God have brought about the world in such a way in which creatures would always choose what is right? H. J. McCloskey makes the following argument:

might not God have very easily so have arranged the world and biased man to virtue that men always freely choose what is right? Clearly theists cannot consistently argue that free will and necessitation to virtue are incompatible, for they represent God himself as possessing a free will and as being incapable of acting immorally.⁹

There are two problems with this sort of objection. First, if God “biased” his free creatures, then could one really say that such creatures have free will? There is no doubt that it is logically

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Plantinga’s argument was a defense and not a theodicy. His appeal to the free agency of demonic creatures was intended to show that it was logically possible for God to allow such natural evils in order to meet the requirements for his defense.

⁸ Due to space, I cannot rehearse the arguments, here, but in Chapter Five I address the question of natural evil by putting forth a natural order response. I will take the conclusions of those arguments from Chapter Five and wed them to the proposed theodicy below.

possible for God to have created a world in which creatures always do his bidding. Let us suppose that God, in some way, built into a creature’s psychological make-up a strong desire to always do His bidding. For example, suppose He installed some complex, say, something similar to a phobia, that, when faced with a choice between \( x \) and \( y \), the creature would always act upon its desire to please God. But let us suppose further that this same complex would keep the person from performing the wrong action out of a fear of displeasing God.\(^\text{10}\) Now such a view is plausible; however, it is not libertarian freewill. If a creature is free, according to the libertarian understanding, then it is not up to God or anyone else what action some creature might choose. If, however, God has “built” into the creature such a mechanism so as to always desire what is right, then, the choice is based on that desire, which was “fixed” by God, and not a response from the agent’s willing. But, as Plantinga has forcefully shown, the heart of the freewill argument is to suggest that it may have been metaphysically impossible for God to actualize such a world.\(^\text{11}\) Plantinga gives an example of a politician named Curly, who accepts a bribe of $35,000. But Smedes, the one who bought Curly with the bribe, wonders if he could have gotten Curly for less, say $20,000. Given this scenario, it seems that one of two outcomes is possible: 1) If Curly had been offered $20,000, he would have taken it; and 2) If Curly had been offered $20,000, he would not have taken it. Either choice is logically possible; however, if Curly is significantly free, then whichever of the two actions he chooses, whether Curly accepts the bribe or whether he rejects it, it means that the other is a state of affairs (possible world) such that God

\(^{10}\) Van Inwagen, “The Argument from Evil,” 66.

\(^{11}\) Plantinga, God, Freedom, and Evil, 31. Note here that I am speaking of metaphysical possibility and not logical possibility. Without doubt it was logically possible for God to create such a world, whereby creatures with libertarian freedom could always do the good, but given that humans have libertarian freedom, whether such a world ever takes place or not is not entirely up to God. Not every logically possible world, in others words, is a feasible one, one able to be actualized by God.
could not have actualized it. So the moral of the story is that, if Plantinga’s argument is successful, there are some worlds that God could not have weakly actualized.\textsuperscript{12}

Concerning the second part of McCloskey’s objection, it seems that he is mixing proverbial apples with oranges. There is a difference between a necessary being, who has as His essential nature the quality of being good, and that of a finite, contingent being, who does not have “goodness” as an essential part of its nature. Moreover, there is a significant difference between being good and the capacity to \textit{do} good.

William Rowe provides a third objection to the Freewill theodicy. In Response to William Alston, Rowe makes the following claim:

But, of course, it is sometimes right to curtail a particular exercise of free will when one foresees or predicts that its exercise is evil and/or will result in considerable suffering. Since curtailing a particular exercise of free will does not significantly diminish a person’s overall degree of freedom, the question at hand is whether it is rational to believe that an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being would have prevented the particular exercise of free will (if that is what it was) Sue’s attacker engaged in when he brutally beat, raped, and strangled the five-year-old child.\textsuperscript{13}

Here, it may be true that by “curtailing” some exercise of free will that it would not take away or diminish a person’s overall freedom. But there are several items to consider. First, while God’s curtailing one act of freewill may not, necessarily, diminish that person’s overall degree of freedom, we must discern how that one act of freedom interconnects with a variety of other acts of freedom. Would God, by removing some exercise of free will, eliminate several other interconnected acts of freewill? Second, how would one draw the line in the curtailing of such freedoms? Just because it may appear to us, in this one particular instance, that it would have been better for God to curtail a certain exercise of freedom, we cannot see the ripple effects or

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 45-49.

repercussions that such might cause. Without drawing the line in a way that inevitably may seem to those afflicted with cognitive limitations such as ours, God’s interventions would almost certainly prove to become ubiquitous.

Soul-Making Theodicy

The Soul-making theodicy has been proposed by such theological figures as the Church Father, Irenaeus, and the Protestant liberal theologian, Frederic Schleiermacher. But, perhaps, it was John Hick who most famously advanced this argument in his work *Evil and the God of Love*. Hick, working from the theological anthropology of Irenaeus, suggests that God created human beings in two stages. The first stage was to create human beings with personal life, who were rational and capable of having a relationship with God. This, says Hick, was easy (anthropomorphically speaking) for God to do. The second stage, however, was not something that God could bring about by “divine fiat.” Concerning this second stage, Hick says “personal life is essentially free and self-directing. It cannot be perfected by divine fiat, but only through the uncompelled responses and willing co-operation of human individuals in their actions and reactions in the world in which God has placed them.” What is it, then, that God wanted to bring about in His creatures? Hick believes that God, in wanting to “bring many sons to glory,”

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16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 256. Here Hick quotes Hebrews 2:10.
put human beings into the kind of world that would produce certain characteristics within them. Through the world that God created He wanted to build souls.\textsuperscript{18}

Hick believes that Irenaeus provides an “outline” to approaching the problem from evil in his theology that stands in contrast to the Augustinian model of the tragic Fall of humanity.\textsuperscript{19} He goes on to explain:

Instead of the doctrine that man was created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed his own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, Irenaeus suggests that man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker. Instead of the fall of Adam being presented, as in the Augustinian tradition, as an utterly malignant and catastrophic event, completely disrupting God’s plan, Irenaeus pictures it as something that occurred in the childhood of the race, an understandable lapse due to weakness and immaturity rather than an adult crime full of malice and pregnant with perpetual guilt. And instead of the Augustinian view of life’s trials as a divine punishment for Adam’s sin, Irenaeus sees our world of mingled good and evil as a divinely appointed environment for man’s development towards the perfection that represents the fulfillment of God’s good purpose for him.\textsuperscript{20}

For Hick, humans were created with an epistemic distance from God. He thinks the Christian creation “myth” provides a basic portrait of human freedom. Humans were not created in a high and lofty state, where they were in “a continuous awareness of God’s environing presence”; rather, what we see is a portrait of “a frail, uncertain creature living in his own world, to which God is but an occasional visitor.”\textsuperscript{21} Hick continues, “when God summoned man out of the dust of the evolutionary process He did not place him in the immediate consciousness of His own presence but in a situation from which man could, if he would, freely enter into the divine

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 257.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 214.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 214-215.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 282.
Kingdom and presence.” For Hick, however, the epistemic distance that humans now face was not a result of the Fall; rather, it is the situation of our human experience as being a creature of God who has not yet fully arrived to his destination. God’s human creatures, left in such an environment, would lead, inevitably, to turning away from God.

For Hick evil is a necessary feature of our world without which certain goods could not be had. He posits two worlds, one a “hedonistic paradise” and the other the world in which we live that has a great amount of evils in it. The atheistic antagonist, says Hick, expects the world to be like the former. Since the world is not like that, “it proves to them that God is either not loving enough or not powerful enough to create such a world.” But what was God’s ultimate purpose? Was it to make a world that is convenient and comfortable, or does God aim to create a world with an environment that builds “moral beings . . . through their own free insights and responses”?

On this point, Hick continues by providing an analogy between a parent and his children, which he believes clarifies God’s purposes in creating this world:

I think it is clear that a parent who loves his children, and wants them to become the best human beings that they are capable of becoming, does not treat pleasure as the sole and supreme value. Certainly we seek pleasure for our children, and take great delight in obtaining it for them; but we do not desire for them unalloyed pleasure at the expense of their growth in such even greater values as moral integrity, unselfishness, compassion, courage, humour, reverence for the truth, and perhaps above all the capacity for love. . . . And to most parents it seems more important to try to foster quality and strength of character in their children than to fill their lives at all times with the utmost possible degree of pleasure. If, then, there is any true analogy between God’s purpose for his human creatures, and the purpose of loving and wise parents for their children, we have to recognize that the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain cannot be the supreme and overriding end for which the world exists. Rather, this world must be a place of soul-building.

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22 Ibid., 282-283.
23 Ibid., 284.
24 Ibid. 257.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 258-259.
Thus God’s ultimate intention in creating was to produce a world in which His creatures could grow and obtain a certain character. In order to build souls, God would have to create a world that contains evil.

There is much that can be gleaned from Hick’s soul-making response to evil. The Christian theist will no doubt agree that God created the world in such a way that it was meant to produce a certain quality of life for His human creatures, not just *bios* (biological) but *zoe* (qualitative). In creating a world such as ours, God did not seek to create a “hedonistic paradise,” but as Hick rightly points out, God sought to create a world whereby His human creatures exhibit a character that is full of “moral integrity, unselfishness, compassion, courage, humour, reverence for the truth, and perhaps above all the capacity for love.”

Furthermore, there is a sense in which God created his human creatures with some epistemic distance. Upon a careful reading of Genesis narrative, Scripture seems to indicate

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27 Ibid., 257.

28 Ibid., 259.

29 Hick has this to say regarding epistemic distance: “In creating finite persons to love and be loved by Him God must endow them with a certain relative autonomy over against Himself. But how can a finite creature, dependent upon the infinite Creator for its very existence and for every power and quality of its being, possess any significant autonomy in relation to the Creator? The only way we can conceive is that suggested by our actual situation. God must set man at a distance from Himself, from which he can then voluntarily come to God. But how can anything be set at a distance from One who is infinite and omnipresent? Clearly spatial distance means nothing in this case. The kind of distance between God and man that would make room for a degree of human autonomy is epistemic distance. In other words, the reality and presence of God must not be borne in upon men in the coercive way in which their natural environment forces itself upon their attention. The world must be to man, to some extent at least, *etsi deus non daretur*, ‘as if there were no God.’ God must be a hidden deity, veiled by His creation. He must be knowable, but only by a mode of knowledge that involves a free personal response on man’s part, this response consisting in an uncompelled interpretive activity whereby we experience the world as mediating the divine presence. Such a need for a human faith-response will secure for man the only kind of freedom that is possible for him in relation to God, namely cognitive freedom, carrying with it the momentous possibility of being either aware or unaware of his Maker” (Ibid., 281). While I agree with Hick that some amount of epistemic distance, perhaps a partial epistemic distance, is needed, I find his argument that such a distance “as if there were no God” a *non-sequitur*, since we do see in the Genesis narrative that God makes Himself known to His creatures and seems to do so on a regular basis.
that while God’s human creatures were aware of His presence, there is a sense, nevertheless, that His presence was not an immediate and overtly pervasive presence (Gen 3:8). The garden, according to the Genesis narrative, was something like a sacred space.\(^{30}\) It was a place where our original parents met with God. Kenneth Matthews describes this meeting as follows, along with the impending effects of broken fellowship sin brought about:

> The anthropomorphic description of God “walking” (*mithallēk*) in the garden suggests the enjoyment of fellowship between him and our first parents. . . . “Walked with God” is a favorite expression in Genesis, depicting the righteous conduct of Israel’s heroes, including Enoch, Noah, and Abraham.\(^{191}\) Yet now the man and the woman are hiding from God in fear. God’s presence is also noted by his “walking” in the camp and sanctuary of Israel. Later Israel recognized that God demanded holiness and obedience if he were to continue to “walk” among his people. It was part of the sad deception that the man and woman who wanted so much to be “like God,” rather than obtaining the stature of deity, are afraid even to commune with him. The language of the verse, “the man and his wife,” imitates the description of the couple when in their innocence they had lived without shame (2:25). Now they have lost their innocence, their childish trust in the goodness of God. “Among [i.e., in the midst of] the trees of the garden” echoes v. 3, which describes the forbidden tree “in the midst of the garden.” Their disobedience at the “tree” of knowledge leads to this hiding among the “trees.” They are pictured in the narrative like children hiding in fearful shame from their father.\(^{31}\)

Before the Fall, our original parents had fellowship with God and maintained a status of something like an “unconfirmed creature holiness.”\(^{32}\) So the Christian theist will want to nuance Hick’s perspective on epistemic distance a bit to suggest that it was only a partial distance, that is to say, such a distance did not necessitate moral evil and that there was only enough of an

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\(^{32}\) Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, revised and expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2007), 58; idem. *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 231. Ryrie’s definition of humanity’s nature as a moral being before the Fall is helpful. It recognizes that there was a certain quality of holiness to humanity before the Fall, though the holiness was creaturely and incomplete.
epistemic gap in their awareness of God that would allow them to respond in a significant manner. Such a distance, then, does not require evil.

Lastly, to support the notion of soul-making, there are numerous instances within Scripture that would suggest our experiences—some of which are full of pain and suffering—build our characters (Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7; Rom 5:3-4; 8:17-18; Phil 3:10-11), and that these painful experiences often bring about great goods.

Hick’s soul-making theodicy, however, is not without its difficulties. The first difficulty is Hick’s insistence that evil is a necessary feature of this world in order to produce certain virtues, such as courage, patience, and compassion. I do not disagree with Hick, here, that in creating His human creatures, God wanted them to have certain virtues. But I am not convinced that evil, and particularly moral evil, was necessary for God to do this. All that is required is a world, such as ours, with some amount of risk. If, as argued in the previous section, that God created humans to “subdue” the earth, then there is quite a challenge in that—a challenge that comes with significant risk attached to it. In order to subdue the creation, to populate the earth, and the like, it would mean that Adam and his descendants were to travel outside of the boundaries of the safety of the garden paradise. Leaving safety to go out to an untamed world would be quite risky. Moreover, a virtue like courage does not require evil, but it does require risk. We can think of various kinds of projects that humans might take on, but that, nevertheless, may result in failure. The failure may lead to disappointment, but it does not seem to me, at least, that disappoint is an evil (especially if we take it that not all pain or displeasure is an evil, as I have argued). The disappointment of failure may lead us to step out to fulfill our goal with greater determination. Part of the problem that humans face is that we do not know what it is like

to experience such things as failure and disappointment apart from our fallen nature. We are epistemically challenged by such a limitation.

A second difficulty is that Hick denies the Fall. While there are questions regarding the extent and ramifications of the Fall, it is, nevertheless, an important feature of Christian theology and should not be done away with. Further, like the Freewill Defense, the Fall provides some valuable insights for a genuine Christian theodicy.

The third and last difficulty is the divine determination of evil in the world so that good may result. In his book, *God, Why This Evil?*, Bruce Little takes it that any position that requires evil as necessary in order to bring about a greater good is problematic.

If the good is necessary, then so is the particular evil, for if the good could be accomplished with a lesser evil, then the all-good God would use the lesser evil. The end is, that the particular evil is necessary, for the good could not obtain without the evil and the good must obtain because it is necessary. If the good is necessary, and it is dependent on the evil, then the evil must also be necessary. If the evil is necessary, I see little hope of escaping the conclusion that God must have determined the evil. Otherwise, there could be no assurance that there would be the good.  

By affirming such a view, says Little, it “makes God directly responsible for the evil—not in a contingent way, but in a necessary way.”

Not everyone, however, finds Little’s dilemma problematic for the theist. For example, in a recent article, Christian philosopher James Spiegel defends a version of the soul-making theodicy. While he recognizes that the soul-making theodist is forced to embrace the first horn of Little’s proposed dilemma, he does not find it to present a difficulty for the theist, especially when we consider the difference between moral evil and natural evil. By natural evil, Spiegel

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34 Bruce A. Little, *God, Why This Evil* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2010), 68.

35 Ibid.
means any evil that refers to pain and suffering, and by moral evil he means those evils that are a result of immoral choices. Regarding natural evil, he says:

Is it problematic, from a Christian perspective, to suggest that God ordains pain and suffering? I don’t see why it would be, given that Scripture contains many assertions of God’s doing just this, such as when he punishes people for their sin (e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah, the Canaanites, Ananias and Sapphira) or when he tests or disciplines the righteous (e.g., Abraham, Job, Jesus).36

I find Spiegel’s response problematic for three reasons. First, unless we hold to the hedonistic principle that all pain is evil, then we must be careful in nuancing our discussion of “pain” as being an evil. We cannot lump all forms of pain together into one category. Moreover, as argued in chapter four, it does not seem that pain is the real culprit; rather, it is the effect that severe pain has brought on us or it is the condition that brought on the pain itself in the first place that is the real issue. Second, it seems that Spiegel is confusing God’s permission to allow certain instances of evil with God’s determining certain instances of evil. If God has ordered creation in such a way that it allows for libertarian freedom, on the one hand, and natural processes to be as they were designed to be or to operate as they do (e.g., plate tectonics, quarks, atoms, biological processes, and so on), on the other, then there is a fair amount that God has not determined, but allows. Third, we must be careful not to confuse God’s bringing about judgment or discipline on individuals, which results in pain and suffering for the individual, with God’s determining all pains and suffering that take place.

But what about moral evil? Spiegel finds this much more problematic (as he should), but points to Genesis 50:20 and Acts 2:23 as possible examples. We will consider each passage in order.

Regarding the first passage, Joseph, after having been sold into slavery by his brothers and eventually restored to them, proclaims, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (ESV). No doubt we see from this passage God’s sovereignty at work; however, the passage does not require determinism. We see determinism in this passage only if we assume determinism at the start.

Consider the following analogy. Suppose that my son is about to do something to his sister, whereby it might cause some pain or suffering, such as pushing her down or the like. Now, I could either choose to stop him or I can choose to let him go through with it. Whichever choice I make, in either case I did not determine nor did I ordain either my son’s intentions or his actions, even if I have good reasons for allowing him to go through with it. Rather, what I have done is to permit my son to follow through with his intentions. Yet, despite my son’s actions, I may choose to bring some good out of it. Suppose that I send my son to time out and, in order to cheer up my daughter, allow her to eat ice cream while watching her favorite T. V. show. Through this experience my daughter might rightly say, “he meant it for evil, but you, Dad, meant it for good.” In the same way, why could we not understand the story of Joseph in a similar way? Rather than God determining the events of Joseph’s life, He brought good out of the free choices of His human creatures.

Acts 2:23 is a bit more challenging than Genesis 50:20. In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter proclaims to the Jews listening, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (ESV). No doubt that such a passage as Acts 2:23 demonstrates God’s sovereignty over all that takes place, but
does it require that God determined certain evils? Much of the answer to that question depends on the relationship between *boulē* (plan) and *prognōsei* (foreknowledge).

Given the nature of the construction of the text, there is more than one possibility: (1) the concepts are distinct; (2) one of the concepts is subsumed under the other; (3) the concepts are in some sense overlapping; or (4) the terms are identical. Of these options, that the two are identical is least likely, as Daniel Wallace explains:

If “foreknowledge” defines “predetermination,” this opens the door that (according to one definition of *πρόγνωσις*) God’s decree is dependent on his omniscience. But if the terms are distinguishable, the relationship may be reversed, viz., omniscience is dependent on the eternal decree. Without attempting to resolve this theological issues entirely, it can nevertheless be argued that the “identical” view is unlikely: the least attested meaning of impersonal constructions is referential identity. The relationship between the two terms here may be one of distinctness or the subsumption of one under the other.

In this case, then, the debate cannot be solved by the construction alone. In his own view, Wallace takes the side of God’s *prognōsei* (foreknowledge) as grounded in God’s *hōrismenē* *boulē* (definite plan). He bases this on what he considers to be a key foci of the chapter, namely, “the divine plan in relation to the Messiah’s death and resurrection.” Whether one agrees with Wallace’s reasoning for grounding *prognōsei* in the *hōrismenē* *boulē* of God or not (I am not convinced that his reasoning requires it to be taken that way), the key is that the construction itself does not demand one way or another. Other factors must be considered, particularly the context, and, perhaps, other theological reasons, too.

Historically, there was not just one position on predestination and free will in the Greco-Roman world, nor was there only one view in Palestine during the time of Jesus and Paul. While


38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.
God’s sovereignty over history was a central belief of most Jews, it by no means excluded human free choice.\(^40\) But what if Wallace is right that \textit{prognōsei} is subsumed by \textit{hōrismenē}? Does it require determinism? Here, I think not. Suppose we translate \textit{horizō} as the NIV14 has: “deliberate.”\(^41\) This is somewhat of a weaker word than “determined” or “predetermined,” but, nevertheless, seems to be a genuine possibility. When we think of “deliberate,” we have something in mind like “conscious” or “intentional.” Now, let us consider an analogy to flesh

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\(^{40}\) For an extensive and well documented discussion, see Craig Keener, \textit{Acts: An Exegetical Commentary}, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 927-938.

\(^{41}\) Such a translation is justified. As for the passage in question, Luke’s use of \textit{hōrismenē} (definite) is an attributive participle, which means that it attributes some kind of characteristic to God’s \textit{boulē} (plan). In its basic sense, \textit{horizō} means “to separate entities and establish a boundary.” [\textit{Gr lexicons}]

\footnote{\textit{Gr lexicons} refer to Greek lexicons such as the English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 723.] This is how it is often taken in the LXX, as in to separate, marking out land territory or boundaries, or dividing/allotting an inheritance (Nu 34:6; Jos 13:7, 27; Jos 15:12; 18:20; 23:4; Pr 18:18; Ez 47:20). The New Testament, however, seems to use the word in a more nuanced way. For example, for the verse in question, the ESV and RSV renders \textit{hōrismenē} as “definite”; whereas the NASB takes it as “predetermined,” the HCSB as “determined,” and the NIV14 as “deliberate.” Apart from one occurrence in Romans (1:4 “declared”) and one in Hebrews (4:7 “appoints”), the word is primarily found in Luke and Acts, which the ESV translates as “determined” (Luke 22:22; Acts 11:29; Acts 17:26) and “appoints” (Acts 10:42; Acts 17:31) in those passages. Interestingly enough, N. T. Wright translates Luke 22:22 much closer to how we see the word used in the LXX: “as it is marked out for him” [\textit{Gr lexicons}, especially for the optative, which means that they carry with them the possibility that people can, indeed, “reach out” and “find” God, though the outcome may be bleak and their efforts in vain apart from God’s revelation. For an extensive and well documented discussion, see Craig Keener, \textit{Acts: An Exegetical Commentary}, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 567]. I take it that, perhaps, we may be seeing something similar with respect to the usage of \textit{horizō} in Acts 2:23, since Peter singles out that it was the “Men of Israel” who had “crucified and killed” Jesus “by the hands of lawless men.” In other words, \textit{horizō} does not require that God cause all actions. If that is the case, then, even if God’s plan is “determined,” “predetermined,” “deliberate,” or “definite” (or however one translates it, here), \textit{it does not entail determinism}, that is to say, it does not entail the view that God caused all events or that all events \textit{must} have taken place. That some events \textit{have taken place} does not entail that they \textit{had to have taken place}. Now, it may seem that what I am advocating is that \textit{prognōsei} (foreknowledge) grounds God \textit{hōrismenē} \textit{boulē} (definite plan). That may be right, and that would be my take, but it need not be the case. Perhaps there is a third option, that, though God’s determined plan and foreknowledge are related, there is a genuine “distinctness” between them, as Wallace seems to leave open as a possibility. Must one be subsumed under the other? Perhaps both are subsets of another category. With either interpretation of \textit{prognōsei}, the passage does not demand that God cause all events, particularly those events surrounding Jesus’s crucifixion, even if they are part of God’s “definite plan.”

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\[^{41}\textit{Gr lexicons}\]
this out. Suppose that a CEO has a plan of letting the company go. Before taking action, he turns to his consultants for advice (interestingly enough, boulē could also mean counsel). Now, while it is the CEO’s plan, it is a deliberate (or well thought out) plan, since he sought counsel from his advisors. Perhaps, here, we can think of the relation between God’s plan and foreknowledge in the same manner. God’s plan is not grounded in His foreknowledge; rather, God’s foreknowledge, much like the consultants, informs His plan.

There is also a theological reason for thinking that God did not determine the evil that Christ experienced. In John 10:17-18 we read:

17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (ESV).

In this passage we see that Jesus suffered, because Jesus gave himself freely. Jesus freely giving of Himself is in compliance with God’s plan (perhaps, worked out in the divine counsel of the persons of the Trinity?), but not determined. So, it would not seem, then, that Acts 2:23 require that God determine evil, even if God had a “determined plan.”

Lastly, to say that omniscience (if one interprets prognōsei that way, as Wallace seems to be doing) is a subset or subsumed under God’s plan seems philosophically, theologically, and logically untenable. In order to plan something, one must know quite a bit. Take, for example, the simple act of making scrambled eggs. In order to make scrambled eggs, one must know that there are such things as eggs, that eggs are good and edible, and how to crack said eggs in order to put it into the skillet. But even more, one must know that a stove exists, that the stove must be turned on to cook, and so on. There is much knowledge and thought that goes into the task of making something as simple as scrambled eggs. Now, when we consider the complexity of the universe alone, human history, God work in restoring humanity, and so on, obviously much more
knowledge is needed. So, in this sense, knowledge must be logically prior to any plan. Furthermore, Christians rightly acknowledge that God might not have created. If God exists *a se*, then creation was not necessary. Suppose that God had not created. We would, then, not have had need of a plan; however, God would have still been omniscient. Things like plans are contingent features of any state of affairs; whereas omniscience, on the other hand, is not. It is an essential feature of God’s nature, that without which, God would not be God, and it is something that God must have in all possible worlds.

Despite its limitations, the soul-making theodicy does provide some valuable features that can be part of an overarching theodicy, which I will consider below. Before concluding this section, it would be helpful to consider one additional theodicy—Alvin Plantinga’s ‘O Felix Culpa’ theodicy.

‘O Felix Culpa’ Theodicy

In his ‘O Felix Culpa’ theodicy, Alvin Plantinga begins by considering what sort of world God could have created. Rejecting the Leibnizian view that God must have created the best of all possible worlds, Plantinga argues that God only needs to weakly actualize “an extremely good feasible world.” But considering those possible worlds with “good-making qualities,” what makes one possible world more valuable than any other? Plantinga suggests that out of all the possible worlds that God could have created, those worlds in which God exists are extremely more valuable than any world in which He does not. But given that God is a necessary

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42 Which means something like “O happy fault” in reference to Adam’s sin.

being, any world that He so chooses is a world in which He exists.\footnote{Ibid., 7.} This, in and of itself, is a great good, for, as Plantinga asserts, “God is unlimited in goodness and holiness, as well as in power and knowledge; these properties, furthermore, are essential to Him.”\footnote{Ibid., 8.} Thus any world in which God exists is enormously valuable. And if one were to take a world in which God does not exist, but in which all of the creatures always acted in the rightly, and compared that with a world in which God exists, the goodness of the world in which God exists is incommensurable to the (impossible) world with merely creaturely goods.\footnote{Ibid., 9.} Taking this further, Plantinga suggests, given Christian theism, out of all the possible worlds that God could have created, those worlds which have divine-incarnation and atonement tower above all of the rest.\footnote{Ibid., 7.} But such worlds also include evil and suffering. So, given Plantinga’s view, how might he respond to the question: “Why is there evil in the world?” Evil exists in the world, says Plantinga, because “God wanted to create a highly eligible world, wanted to actualize one of the best of all the possible worlds; all those worlds contain atonement, hence they all contain sin and evil.”\footnote{Ibid., 12.} Therefore, in the debate between infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism, the Supra’s got it right!\footnote{Infralapsarianism is the view that God decreed to permit sin before decreeing to save some of the fallen; whereas, the Supralapsarian view takes it that God decreed to save some before decreeing to permit sin. See Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa’,” 1.}

While there are many difficulties with this view, which I will get to below, I do believe that Plantinga has provided us with a framework for thinking about theodicy. Surely, as Plantinga suggests, there are certain worlds that are better than others that God could create. I 

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{Ibid., 7.}
  \item \footnote{Ibid., 8.}
  \item \footnote{Ibid., 9.}
  \item \footnote{Ibid., 7.}
  \item \footnote{Ibid., 12.}
\end{itemize}
would also agree with Plantinga that there may not be a best of all possible worlds (perhaps there is a tie, for all we know). So, out of all the possible worlds that God could weakly actualize, such a world must be “an extremely good feasible world.”

So far so good, but what makes one world better than other worlds? For Plantinga, it is those worlds with incarnation and atonement. Why, then, is there sin and evil in the world? On Plantinga’s theodicy, William Hasker puts it as follows:

The reason there is sin and evil in the world is not, as the free-will defense would have it, that they are the byproducts, which God cannot prevent, of a world containing free will. The reason, rather, is that they are among the necessary conditions of a world containing incarnation and atonement. God doesn’t just put up with sin and suffering in his world; he positively seeks them out by selecting a world to actualize that contains plenty of both. The free-will defense is not, perhaps, invalidated by this; it may still perform its function of showing that God and evil are logically compatible with each other. But the “real reason” for sin and evil (and Plantinga does seem to think he has found the real reason; that is, he thinks his theodicy is true) is something else entirely.

In such a theodicy, then, while the free-will defense maintains some force in answering the logical problem of evil, it becomes deficient in answering both the evidential, and I believe, the existential problems, especially if sin and evil become a necessary feature of the world in order to arrive at a divine end. In such a theodicy, God is, as Hasker suggests, “using his creatures, treating them as a means and not as ends in themselves, placing them in great peril in order to get the glory of saving them.”

Plantinga recognizes the above objection and likens it to a father throwing his son into the river only to heroically rescue him. He seeks to stifle this objection by providing cases in which it is perfectly legitimate to treat someone as a means and not an end. Take, for example,

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50 Ibid., 6.


52 Ibid., 168-169.
when someone hires a person to perform a task. In both cases, it may be that the person is using the other as a means. The employer is using the employee as a means to accomplish a job; whereas the employee is using the employer as a means to earn money. The problem, however, is that the employee was offered the job. She could have easily refused it. Plantinga suggests that with God it is different:

He doesn’t ask our permission before creating us, before actualizing this world in which we are called upon to suffer. We don’t accept the suffering voluntarily; we don’t get a choice; God doesn’t consult us before actualizing this world, this world that requires our suffering. Obviously he couldn’t have consulted us about whether we wish to be created in a world such as this, but still he doesn’t; and isn’t that somehow unfair? So with respect to this strand of the objection, the charge is twofold: (a) God requires his creatures to suffer, not for their own good, but in order to advance some aims or ends of his own; and (b) God does this without asking their permission.53

Plantinga seeks to solve this conundrum by making several distinctions. Surely there would be no such issue if a person were to freely consent to suffering so that God might bring about a greater good for another or for the world as a whole. But what if the person does not consent? For those who are incapable to consent (e.g., a person in a coma), there are times that it is acceptable for another person to make the choice for them. Suppose further, however, that the person freely chooses not to consent, but God recognizes that she does so out of ignorance. If she only knew the real reasoning and great benefits the suffering will bring, she would gladly accept it. Lastly, consider that the reason she freely rejects such suffering in her life is because she has disordered affections. God knows that if her affections were ordered rightly, then she would freely accept the suffering. In each of these cases, Plantinga believes that God’s being perfectly loving would not preclude the individual from suffering.54


54 Ibid., 23-24.
How might we respond to Plantinga? To begin with, I take it as problematic that sin is necessary for God to bring about His purposes. There is no doubt that Christ’s incarnation and atonement are immensely important to Christian theology and are very great gifts as a result of humanity’s sin. But regarding incarnation, Plantinga is assuming that God might not have had any other reasons for becoming incarnate. In fact, some Orthodox traditions believe that it is perfectly conceivable to think of Christ becoming incarnate, even if Adam had not sinned. Such an act would be a result of His divine love and grace. I suspect that much of what is driving Plantinga’s theodicy stems from his Reformed tradition, namely Reformed soteriology. Involved in our salvation is both redemption and glorification; however, the assumption, I believe, is that one is logically connected to the other. Given the Fall, I would agree. But, perhaps there is a sense in which humans were not complete before the Fall and were still in need of divine help to obtain God’s goal for humanity (e.g., glorification). Perhaps, as the doctrine of *theosis* suggests, the goal of creating humans was so that they might grow in greater and greater love and unity with their Creator, with one another, and with creation. To achieve this, perhaps all that is required is for the world to be such that it allows for significant choices, difficult tasks, and assistance from the incarnate Son. Or, as Hasker suggests, “If suffering is as good as Plantinga thinks it is (which is certainly open to doubt), then those sin-free worlds might contain extremely difficult tasks, set both for the incarnate Son and for his followers (i.e., in such worlds, for everyone)—tasks that would involve serious suffering, though not of course separation from God and his love.”

55 In such a case we might have had suffering without sin.

Regarding Plantinga’s conundrum and the distinctions he makes, I find them wanting. Biblically speaking, Paul was adamant that we should not do evil so good may come about (Rom

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3:8). In the same sense, I find it difficult to believe, based on what we know of God’s goodness, God would bring about evil (sin) so that good may obtain.

As noted, I do think Plantinga has clued us in on an important requirement for theodicy, namely, that God had specific intentions of bringing about a world—an extremely good and feasible world. But rather than thinking that God’s intention in creating was to save (redeem) a people for His own, which requires both sin and the Fall, as is often emphasized in Reformed theology, it would be better to think that all along God had intended on bringing about something else, namely, a kingdom that is filled with a great diversity of creatures, some of which have the capacity to freely choose to serve and love their Creator. Bringing about such a kingdom does not require evil, but only a world with great freedom, significance, and challenges, such as are found in our world.

Concluding Thoughts

Upon examining each of the three theodicies, it is clear that no single one provides a full explanation for why God allows evil in the world. It seems that for any theodicy to be successful, it must be multi-dimensional and cumulative in nature. As I will show below, when we put together the strengths of the above three theodicies, along with some of the conclusions reached from previous chapters, a fuller theodical response begins to emerge.

**Trinitarian Perichoretic Theodicy**

Having worked through certain conclusions above and in Chapters Five through Seven, shall we now bring it all together? I will do so by means of a story.

*There is one, eternal, all-mighty, all-knowing, and all-good God, who is the Creator of all things. Central to the very nature of this God are two positive ontological affirmations:*
God is light and God is love. These two affirmations provide a theological vision for Christian ethical living. As light, God cannot do anything that is morally evil. As love, God seeks out the best for the ‘other.’ It is God’s moral character and essential goodness that grounds His love, and it is His love that seeks out what is best and good and holy for the “other.” Hence God’s loving actions toward His creatures are always for their best. His desire is for His creatures to be in fellowship with Him, because He is the source of life and of all that is good, true, and holy.

Yet, not only is God light and love, but God is also a tri-unity of persons. Within God’s triune nature is the deepest love relationship in all of reality. The kind of love found in the interpenetrating, perichoretic relationship of the Trinity is such that it is self-giving and eternally moving toward the other. Such love is not a passive sympathetic response, nor is it inert; rather, it is active, by which each person is opened up to and gives fully toward the other.

In creating the world, God sought to bring about an extremely good feasible world. The world was not made out of necessity, but out of the abundant overflow of the interpenetrating love relationship of the divine persons. Creation, then, is a gift of divine grace and love. Furthermore, in seeking to create the world, God sought to bring about a kingdom—a kingdom filled with a variety of complex creatures with whom He could share life. The kingdom that God sought to build was one full of goodness, peace, and great care.

Some of the creatures that make up this kingdom are biologically complex, including creatures with sentience and intelligence. Some of the highly complex intelligent creatures, namely God’s human creatures, are capable of having meaningful experiences and entering into significant relationships with God, one another, other creatures, and their
environments. Because such creatures are biological and physical in nature, the world had to be ordered according to a set of natural laws or law-like regulating principles. Therefore, God brought it about so that the world was ‘fine-tuned’ to support such life. The universe, as it now stands, consists of a great variety of goods, both in its physical grandeur and beauty and in the flourishing of a great diversity of biological life that it contains. Consequently, such a world also brings with it the potential that sentient and intelligent life will be negatively affected by the physical processes that govern the formation and operations of the universe. Therefore, any world with great significance, such as the one God created, that is both finite in nature and dynamic, brings with it great risks.

In creating humans, God bestowed great worth upon each of them equally and unqualified. Moreover, God wanted to bring about creatures who could exhibit the same kind of deep love found within the interpenetrating relationship of the Godhead, making them in His image and likeness. God wanted to create individuals who could care deeply for the other; creatures who could love on the deepest levels possible—to love one another in the same way that He Himself loves them—and to care for God’s good creation. However, deep love can only occur from creatures with the capacity of freely giving themselves to others. Because of this, creaturely freedom must resemble, in the closest way possible, the same kind of freedom that God Himself has, that is, a freedom that is non-coerced or determined. Yet, in giving them such freedom, these creatures also had within them the capacity to rebel against their Creator.

Yet, in creating a world with free creatures (angelic and human), God knew that some of them would rebel against Him, rejecting His goodness toward them, and rejecting one another. He also knew that they would bring about great pain and suffering on one another.
This is exactly what took place. God’s creatures sinned against Him, bringing violence to the creation order. Rather than completing their task of subduing and taking care of the earth, God’s human creatures sought their own agendas and brought the creation under great distress. Rebelling against God is a rejection of life and goodness, which, ultimately, brings death—both spiritually and physically. Some of God’s angelic creatures, too, have brought about great destruction both in the natural world and in the lives of God’s human creatures.

God did not leave it at that. Out of His great love, God provided a means for His human creatures to enter back into a relationship with Himself, and to live in such a way that they could, once again, love one another deeply. God’s intentions for His creatures from the beginning was for them to have and share in His own life—life that is abundant. This life, however, can only come through intimate personal relationship and knowledge of the Triune God, and the radical moral transformation that this knowledge makes possible.

In order to solve this problem of separation and to restore His human creatures and the creation order, God has been working in and through human history. God the Son took on a human nature in order to defeat death and to conquer all that opposes His kingdom. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God died on a cross and was raised back to life by the power of the Spirit. With the death and resurrection of God’s Son, God inaugurated something new in the creation order—the end of death and destruction and the beginning of new life—life that begins now for all who believe and trust Him. Through the death and resurrection of His Son, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s human creatures can now experience abundant life—life that is God’s own life, found only in relationship to Him—and demonstrate deep love toward others. They have also been given the power to
overcome sin and violence and oppression in their lives. Salvation is not merely about what takes place in the eschaton, but it is for healing to take place in the here and now. God offers this new life to all his human creatures who will embrace His goodness through the work of His Son on the cross and through His resurrection from the dead.

God the Spirit, too, has been moving throughout the world, bringing about new life. It is through God’s Spirit that God has made Himself known to the world through the Bible and the creation. God’s Spirit has also been at work enlightening people to the truth of God’s work in restoring fallen humanity, convicting the world of sin, changing the hearts of people, and actively indwelling and moving through the people of God—the church.

The role of the church, then, through the power of the Spirit, is to be an ambassador of God’s deep love to the world. God has called the church to be involved in overthrowing sin and violence among the oppressed, seeking out the good for the other, being bearers of peace, helping the widow and orphans in their time of need, blessing those who persecute it, feeding its enemies, defending the weak and victimized, taking care of God’s good creation, and sharing the good news of God’s work in restoring all things. When the church participates in deep love, the kingdom of God breaks through to the here and the now. We catch a glimpse of God’s ultimate triumph, when the world will be rid of sin, oppression, and death. Christian ethics, which is ultimately grounded in the paradigm of God’s interpenetrating love, gives the church the resources to bring about real difference now, but will ultimately escalate when the Son of God brings about His Kingdom, renewing all things. But moreover, God has called his people to recognize that the present suffering they are now going through leads to a maturity in character and will ultimately advance God’s kingdom as they are faithful to His goal. Furthermore, what they are presently going
through pales in comparison to what awaits them when God makes all things new—a newly resurrected body in the eternal kingdom of God of the restored creation. In this restored creation we find heaven and earth coming together under the reign and rule of our Great God.

One day God will bring it about that all sin, death, and evil will be overcome. Just as God has redeemed His human creatures, reconciling them to Himself, He will also restore all of creation. In reconciling all things to Himself, God will bring about His kingdom—the perichoretic kingdom—which was His intentions from the beginning. It will be a kingdom of peace and shalom, whereby, there will be no more pain, suffering, violence, or hurt. God’s human creatures will demonstrate God’s own love, reciprocating it not only to God, but to one another and to creation. This kingdom will be a kingdom of flourishing and life, whereby God’s creatures will live to their fullest. In this kingdom, God’s righteousness, holiness, and love will reign supreme. Through the indwelling Spirit, God’s people will be united to Christ and to the Father, and all of creation, full of God’s presence, will rejoice in the greatness of God for its redemption. It is in this way that God will be All and in all.

Because God is that which nothing greater can be conceived, God is the ultimate Good—a good incommensurate to all of the created goods and temporal evils found in this world.\(^{56}\) In contrast to other worldviews, which the joys we experience are destined for extinction, the incommensurate good relation of the Triune God of Christian theism defeats any of the sufferings that may be endured in this life, including those horrific evils that rob us of any meaning, turning our deepest tragedies into victories and our greatest sorrows into joys.

TPT and The Existential Problem

Having proposed TPT, we now turn to the Existential Problem from Evil (EPE). As suggested earlier, an adequate theodicy not only answers why God allows evil, but it must also give us reasons for thinking about what God is doing about all of the evil in the world. God may be justified in allowing evil; but is He doing anything to stop it? I believe that TPT satisfies both conditions. In what follows, I want to flesh out how the proposed theodicy gives us a framework for thinking about the existential and pastoral question of suffering.

Evil and Divine Suffering

One’s theology, which is intricately connected to one’s theodicy, shapes not only how one responds to the problem of evil, but also how one responds to those who are suffering great evil. I will return to this below, but for now, it is important to see God’s own response to evil in the world.

At the center of TPT is, as I have argued, the notion of deep interpenetrating love. Love is at the center of who God is. This love is not a passive kind of love; rather it is an active love that is selfless and seeks out the good for the other. This love is grounded in God’s goodness; yet, this love also directs God’s goodness. Furthermore, as argued in Chapter Five, the God of Christian theism is a God who can act in the world to stop evil, in contrast to the pantheistic and process panentheistic conceptions of God.

Some Christian theists have argued, not only can God act in the world, but that God also suffers along with His creatures. Take, for example, the view of Alvin Plantinga:

God’s capacity for suffering, I believe, is proportional to his greatness; it exceeds our capacity for suffering in the same measure as his capacity for knowledge exceeds ours. Christ was prepared to endure the agonies of hell itself; and God, the Lord of the universe,
was prepared to endure the suffering in order to overcome sin, and death, and the evils that afflict our world, and to confer on us a life more glorious than we can imagine.\textsuperscript{57}

A variety of theologians, too, take it that God is passible. Regarding God’s suffering, Clark Pinnock believes that God’s “suffering or pathos . . . is a strong biblical theme.”\textsuperscript{58} The German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, takes the suffering of God to be central to any theodicy. “If God were incapable of suffering in every respect, then he would also be incapable of love,” says Moltmann.\textsuperscript{59} He continues,

He would at most be capable of loving himself, but not of loving another as himself, as Aristotle puts it. But if he is capable of loving something else, then he lays himself open to the suffering which love for another brings him; and yet, by virtue of his love, he remains master of the pain that love causes him to suffer. God does not suffer out of deficiency of being, like created beings. To this extent he is ‘apathetic’. But he suffers from the love which is the superabundance and overflowing of his being. In so far he is ‘pathetic’.\textsuperscript{60}

Baptist theologian, Millard Erickson, too, thinks that God suffers. Time and again, says Erickson, we see in the Old Testament that God is abandoned by His people, Israel. Furthermore, in passages such as Genesis 6:6 and Psalm 103:13, we are told that God “grieves” over human sin and “pities His children.” There is no doubt some anthropomorphism going on in such passages, but we must not dismiss such images as having no import with respect to God’s nature. But most importantly for Erickson is the incarnation. It is in the incarnation of the Son of God where we see, most clearly, God’s experience of evil. Jesus weeps over the death of his friend, Lazarus (John 11:35). Through this he experienced sorrow. Moreover, Jesus experienced


\textsuperscript{59} Jürgan Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity and the Kingdom}, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 23. It should be noted, here, that by “pathetic,” Moltmann does not refer to how we usually understand the word; rather, it has to do with the capacity for suffering.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
abandonment, suffering, ridicule, physical abuse—and, ultimately, death on the cross.  

When we consider the incarnation, says Erickson, it is difficult to escape the conclusion of divine suffering.

Some theologians have sought to avoid this conclusion and to preserve the impassibility of God by maintaining that Jesus’ suffering was a function only of his human nature. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, held that as God, the Son is impassible. Augustine maintained that “passion,” suggesting disturbance and changeableness, is incompatible with the divine nature. This, however, seems not only to impose upon Jesus a set of conceptions not based upon clear biblical witness, but to divide the unity of the two natures in the one person. It may in effect be a variety of incipient Nestorianism.

Erickson cautions that any suffering that God partakes in, however, is endured voluntarily. God, says Erickson, has chosen at several points certain imposed self-limitations (e.g., creation, making covenants with His people, incarnation). None of these self-limitations, however, leads to any kind of deficiency in the divine nature. God’s suffering is never more clearly seen than in the Son’s death upon the cross, the ultimate outworking of His love toward us. Moreover, it is through the suffering on the cross that God makes possible for His free creatures to be reconciled to Him. Reconciliation does not come without great cost. As Erickson further explains:

Reconciliation, the restoration of relationships that have been broken, always requires some cost, some pain. In quarrels there is an exchange of harsh statements. Each is followed by a similar or perhaps more bitter response. If the quarrel is to cease, someone must decline to respond or retaliate. This means forgoing the satisfaction of returning the pain to the other: And this decision means absorbing the pain into oneself.

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62 Ibid., 609-610.

63 Ibid., 611-612.

64 Ibid., 616.
Erickson suggests this is what God, through Christ, has done on our behalf. He has absorbed the pain and suffering brought about by human sin.65

Unlike these theologians and philosopher, however, I am hesitant to say that God suffers, especially if we understand suffering to mean that God in some sense would not flourish.66 How could the giver of all life not flourish? Such an understanding of God would imply that there was a deficiency in the divine nature. Yet, we must deal with the biblical evidence? Are such passages merely anthropomorphic? How might we resolve this?

On the one hand, there is some bite to the above arguments. There is a real sense in which God experiences the full effects of evil, particularly through the incarnation. Yet, on the other hand, we may not call the experience of these effects of evil suffering. I believe it is precisely because of God’s impassibility—the inability to suffer—in His essential nature that God can withstand the evils in the world. When the Fathers spoke of impassibility, they primarily meant

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66 In Chapter One I distinguish between physical pain, mental pain, and suffering. While both mental pain and physical pain might lead to suffering, nevertheless one might experience suffering apart from either kind of pain altogether. So, in that sense, suffering belongs to a different category. Furthermore, following Stump, I argued that human suffering has to do primarily with what a person most cares about. There are two sides to suffering, as considered in the first chapter, one objective and one subjective. The objective side has to do with someone being kept from flourishing; whereas the subjective element has mostly to do with the desires of a person’s heart not being met. If we take suffering to mean something as we defined it in Chapter One, then it would seem that God is excluded from it. It seems more reasonable to think that God might experience pain than thinking of God as suffering. The experience of pain, as I have argued in both Chapter One and Chapter Five, does not require that one suffer. The experience of pain does not require that one become debilitated by it nor does it cause a lack of flourishing, both of which are impossible for God.
that God is in no way “debilitated” or “crippled” by passions, as humans are, or as one might see among the gods of the Greek and Roman pantheon.\(^{67}\) In other words, God is not fickle in His response to His creatures. It is the doctrines of impassibility and immutability that ensure that God remains steadfast in His nature, character, and responses to His creatures. Furthermore, impassibility does not mean that God is unresponsive. He is not apathetic as the Stoics believed. God is really related. There is genuine love, long-suffering, compassion, and so forth. The doctrine of impassibility, then, in the words of Thomas McCall, “safeguards and protects the fact that holy love is the essence of the triune God.”\(^{68}\) He continues, “Rather than a denial of the love of God, it resoundingly affirms that holy love.”\(^{69}\) Perhaps a better word to use when speaking of divine immutability and impassibility is Karl Barth’s emphasis on “constancy.” God is constant in His nature, character, and responses to His creatures.\(^{70}\)

But how, then, does God experience the full effects of evil? \textit{Pace} McCall there is a sense in which God experienced evil through the incarnation. Following Aquinas and others, McCall


\(^{68}\) Ibid.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.

\(^{70}\) “The immutable is the fact that this God is as the One He is, gracious and holy, merciful and righteous, patient and wise. The immutable is the fact that He is the Creator, Reconciler, Redeemer and Lord. This immutability includes rather than excludes life. . . . God’s constancy—which is a better word than the suspiciously negative word ‘immutability’—is the constancy of His knowing, willing and acting and therefore of His person. It is the continuity, undivertability and indefatigableness in which God both is Himself and also performs His work, . . . It is the self-assurance in which God moves in Himself and in all His works and in which He is rich in Himself and in all His works without either losing Himself or (for fear of this loss) having to petrify in Himself and renounce His movement and His riches. The constancy of God is not then the limit and boundary, the death of His life. For this very reason the right understanding of God’s constancy must not be limited to His presence with creation, as if God in Himself were after all naked ‘immutability’ and therefore in the last analysis death. On the contrary it is in and by virtue of His constancy that God is alive in Himself and in all His works.” Karl Barth, \textit{The Doctrine of God}, vol. 2.1 of \textit{The Church Dogmatics}, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T &T Clark, 2000), 495.
believes that one must maintain a clear “distinction between the humanity and the divinity of Christ.”\textsuperscript{71} Failure to do so, says McCall, may lead to Docetism. But I would agree with Erickson that to deny that God was somehow affected by the evil that Christ experienced may just as easily lead to some form of Nestorianism. Perhaps the solution is in holding to something like Thomas Morris’s two-minds view of Christ. According to Morris there are two distinct centers of consciousness—the divine mind and the human mind. The eternal divine mind of the Son “encompasses the full scope of omniscience.”\textsuperscript{72} The human mind, however, came into existence a finite time in the past. “The earthly range of consciousness, and self-consciousness,” says Morris, “was thoroughly human, Jewish, and first-century Palestinian in nature.”\textsuperscript{73} It would be impossible for the earthly mind to contain the divine mind; rather, what we see is that the divine mind contained the earthly mind. There was an “asymmetric accessing relation between the two minds.”\textsuperscript{74} Morris goes on to explain:

The divine mind had full and direct access to the earthly, human experience resulting from the Incarnation, but the earthly consciousness did not have such full and direct access to the content of the overarching omniscience proper to the Logos, but only such access, on occasion, as the divine mind allowed it to have. There thus was a metaphysical and personal depth to the man Jesus lacking in the case of every individual who is merely human.\textsuperscript{75}

Morris believes that this solution allows for, on the one hand, the human growth and development of Jesus, and, yet, on the other, his cry of dereliction.\textsuperscript{76} If Morris is correct, and

\textsuperscript{71} McCall, Forsaken, 69.


\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. 103.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
something like the two-minds view of Christ is correct, it would mean that the divine mind of the Son had full access to all of the emotions, experiences, pains, and horrors felt by the human nature of Christ. It would go to stand that, though there is a distinction within the persons of the Trinity, and though it was Christ alone who suffered on the cross (on pain of the heresy of patripassianism), nevertheless, given that the Father, Son, and Spirit share divine omniscience, it would seem that each of the divine persons of the Trinity have access to the horrors that Christ suffered and faced through His work and His death in the human nature. In this sense, via divine omniscience, the divine Trinity can relate to the various horrors that people in the world face because of the tragedies that Christ went through on the cross.

Yet, there is another way to think of the divine experience of evil. Having an experience of evil against you is not the same thing as experiencing suffering from the evil. We can make such a distinction in our everyday human experiences. We can imagine cases where a person hurls insults at another, but the person receiving the insults is in no way fazed by the insults, perhaps, because this person has a strong and immovable character when it comes to such things as being insulted. Nevertheless, though not fazed by the insults, the person may take the right steps to reconcile with the one doing the insulting. In this case, the person receiving the insults could retaliate, but, instead, absorbs any effects of evil against her, and then seeks to reconcile with the other. But let us suppose further that some pain is involved. The person receiving the insults feels pain, perhaps even deep pain, from the insults, but nevertheless remains steadfast in character and immovable in resolve. Here, again, the person absorbs the effects of evil—pain in this instance—and, yet, does the good despite the evil. In the same way, God can experience the effects of evil, even if the deliverance of such evils causes deep pain, and He can respond to
them, yet He can do so without being affected by the evil so as to debilitate Him or to change His metaphysical stature in anyway.

Evil and Divine Action

As noted from the above discussion, there is a sense, particularly through the incarnation, that God knows what it means to suffer and to experience the tremendous horrors of the world. Not only does God know these things, there is a real sense in which God is active in defeating evil. In order to see this more clearly, it would be helpful to consider a passage from the book of Job.

In chapter 41 of Job, we see God answering Job out of the windstorm. Job has asked for his day in court with God, and he gets his wish. Rather than Job questioning God, however, it is the Lord who questions Job. The standard reading of this passage takes it that God reminds Job who is in charge and that Job has no right to question Him on these matters. In the end, Job is silenced and realizes his folly. But there is much more to the passage than this. Often, readers fail to recognize the use of Job’s allusions to the ancient Near-eastern mythic tradition throughout in his complaints. As John R. Schneider explains:

In his very first oration, Job uses the mythic tradition to curse the night he was conceived. The anti-cosmic symbolism is powerful: “let those curse it who curse the day, who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan, let the stars of its dawn be dark” (Job 3:8-9). In his second oration he ironically equates himself with chaos.” Am I the sea, or a sea monster, that though hast set guard over me?” (Job 7:12). His personal complaint is expanding swiftly to become global—better no world at all than one in which chaos lives. His distress over the injustice of history reaches its peak when Job considers God’s power over chaos. “By his power he stilled the sea, by his understanding he smote Rahab, by his wind the heavens were made fair, his hand pierced the fleeing serpent” (Job 27:12-13, [his italics]. But this of course is no more the triumphant declaration of praise, as it functions in the tradition. In view of what has happened, and in light of what Job now realizes about the world, it has become an ironic lament, the confession of a bitter, broken and thoroughly bewildered man.77

In the ancient Near-east, the sea is often understood as chaos. It is the unknown and often symbolizes evil. It is also the place where Leviathan—the chaos monster—delves. Psalms 74 and 83, along with Isaiah 51, provide images of God’s defeat over the various manifestations of chaos. Job’s complaint was that the chaos had not died, but was still very much a part of the world. It is no wonder that in chapter 41 God begins His divine speech with the Leviathan. God asks Job, “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tong with a cord?” (Job 41:1, ESV) Then in vv. 10-11 we read, “No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine” (ESV). In other words, God is affirming to Job that the chaos monster is still very much a part of this world. No human can think of stopping or resisting him. But, despite this, God is very much in the midst of the chaos. Rather than the chaos monster being in control, it is God who can lead the chaos monster around, as imaged, by a hook. On this point, Schneider provides helpful insight: “God acknowledges the reality of the chaos, but he now reveals, and Job now sees, that he is in complete control of events. The relationship between God and Leviathan is not friendly, but rather one of grudging domestication.”

From this reading of Job, we see that God is in the midst of the evil that is taking place in the world, and He is doing something about it. In dealing with evil, it takes, in the words of N. T. Wright, God getting his “boots muddy” and “his hands bloody” in order “to put the world back

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78 Ibid., 252, 254.
79 Ibid., 255.
to rights.” 80 This is most clearly seen in the life and person of Jesus of Nazareth. As Wright explains,

Jesus on the cross towers over the whole scene as Israel in person, as YHWH in person, as the point where the evil of the world does all that it can and where the Creator of the world does all that he can. Jesus suffers the full consequences of evil: evil from the political, social, cultural, personal, moral, religious and spiritual angles all rolled into one; evil in the downward spiral hurtling toward the pit of destruction and despair. And he does so precisely as the act of redemption, of taking that downward fall and exhausting it, so that there may be new creation, new covenant, forgiveness, freedom and hope. 81

He continues: “What the Gospels offer is not a philosophical explanation of evil, what it is or why it’s there, nor a set of suggestions for how we might adjust our lifestyles so that evil will mysteriously disappear from the world, but the story of an event in which the living God deals with it.” 82

This work of God is connected with our future hope. As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:54, because of Christ’s work on the cross, “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” God has defeated death and this will ultimately come to fruition. The vision that Revelation 21 paints for us is an image where God will bring about a new heavens and a new earth (v. 2). In this passage we see that there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (v. 4), but we also see that there will be no more sea (v. 1). The old order, with its chaos, death, and destruction will be done away with (v. 4). God’s presence will be fully felt throughout all of the created order (v.3).

80 N. T. Wright, Evil and the Justice of God (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 59.
81 Ibid., 92.
82 92-93.
Evil and the Church

Having seen God’s work in defeating evil through Christ, there is one final area to consider. God has called the church to action in defeating evil in the world. As we begin to think about the church’s response to the existential problem from evil (EPE), there are several important things that we must keep in mind. To begin with, in answering EPE, it is precisely at this point that our theology comes together with praxis. How we respond to EPE is ultimately grounded in what we believe, particularly about God, people, sin, salvation, hope, and so on. In other words, our theology should ground our response to the problem of existential suffering.

In Chapter Seven I gave significant consideration to the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly the doctrine of perichoresis. Furthermore, I discussed how this doctrine informs our thinking about how we should respond to others. If at the center of all reality is this interpenetrating, dynamic, and self-giving love relationship between the persons of the Trinity, then this should inform us about how we are to interact with creation, and particularly human beings. Humans were created in the image and likeness of God. Part of what it means to be created in this image and likeness is to be in relation to one another. Yet, our relationships, as I have argued, should be ones that represent deep love—the same kind of deep love that we see within the perichoretic relationships among the persons of the divine Trinity. When thinking about our response to EPE, the center of our response should be one of self-giving deep love. In other words, our response should be that of care. This response is not merely sympathy toward the other; rather, a deep care that is ultimately self-giving and other-centered.

Reflecting on the doctrines of sin, gospel, and church, too, as we considered in Chapter Seven, should inspire thought about how we should respond to those who are suffering existentially. Sin has caused deep rifts within our relationships—rifts that affect our relationship with God, one another, and with the creation itself. Sin, at its very core, is oppressive and self-
centered. Often, many of the existential sufferings that we see taking place in the world are a
direct result of sin. Yet, through the good news of the gospel, we see God’s response to evil and
sin in the world. It was through Christ’s broken body and resurrection that God defeated death.
Nevertheless, we live in an already/not yet realization of the defeat of evil. As noted above,
Christians have hope that because of Christ’s work in the world a day will come when there will
be no more suffering, pain, and sorrow. Death will be no more (Rev 21:4). Yet, we still live in a
world where pain, death, and suffering are very much reality. But the gospel does not stop with
the reality that death has been defeated through Christ; sin, too, along with its effects, has been
defeated. God, through the gospel, offers new life—eternal life. This life is not something that
begins in the future; rather, it begins now. It was through Christ that God defeated death and sin,
but it is through the Spirit that God brings new life to the world. As the redeemed community of
Christ, then, it is the Spirit who is the agent of change, and it is He who provides the church with
the power to make a difference and to confront the evil in the world. Through the Spirit, God has
supplied all of the power and energy needed to truly be agents and ambassadors of reconciliation.
The church never replaces His work; rather, it is the church in-and-through the power of the
Holy Spirit that God has chosen to confront evils in the world. Therefore the church should be on
the front lines confronting sin, particularly the many social injustices that we see taking place in
the world today, as well as bridging the gap of broken relationships through the preaching and
proclamation of the gospel. Social justice and the gospel are not opposed to one another. Rather,
both have at their center the care and concern for the other.

God has called the church to love its neighbors (Mk 12:31); to help widows and orphans
in their distress (Js 1:27); to love enemies and to make peace so much as it is within its power
(Mt 5:44; Rom 12:14, 16, 18); to forgive unconditionally and to reconcile with those who sin
against it (Mt 5:44; 18:15, 21-22); to turn the other cheek (Mt 5:39) and not seek revenge (Rm 12:19); to give of its material possessions to those in need (Ps 82; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:25-37; Rom 1:13, 20; Js 1:27; 2:14-17; 1 Jn 3:16-18). The church has been called to a life of self-giving love—a love that does not retaliate when wronged or seek revenge. The kind of life that the church has been called to is a kingdom life. Such a life represents God’s intentions all along in creating. This is the very life that we see in the interpenetrating relationship of the divine persons of Trinity and demonstrated in God’s selfless actions toward His creation. Lastly, the church has been called to be a part of God’s work in building His kingdom. When the church accepts its call, it becomes a part of what God is doing (and has been doing throughout the entirety of human history) to confront the evils and horrors in the world.
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUDING MATTERS

This project sought to show that no worldview is exempt from answering the problem from evil. Each worldview must account for the amount, types, and kinds of evil in the world. Of the four worldviews considered, only theism provides a robust and adequate response to the philosophical and theological difficulties raised by evil in the world.

But I have also argued that theism in-and-of-itself is not enough. A specific form of theism is needed—a form of theism that is grounded in the perichoretic relationship of the divine Trinity. Chapter Seven argued that our understanding of the Trinity, particularly the perichoretic relationship of the divine persons, informs our understanding of the world, and particularly human nature. The Trinity is at the center of not only our theology as Christians, but the intra-Trinitarian love relationship between the persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit is at the center of all reality. *Reality is deeply and essentially relational.* This interpenetrating relationship between the persons of the Triune God is dynamic and one that is moving toward and opening up to the “Other.” The Father gives of Himself fully to the Son and the Son gives of Himself fully to the Father and the Spirit gives of Himself fully to the Father and the Son. What we see in the dynamic love relationship between the persons of the Trinity is the deepest love possible. As argued, this deep love that we see within the dynamic relationship of the persons of the Trinity is the same love that, on the one hand, created something “other” (creation) than God out of sheer selfless giving of divine love and grace, and, yet, on the other hand, the kind of love that God lavished upon His human creatures in making them in His image and likeness. It is this same kind of deep love that God expects for his human creatures to have in their relationships with one another and with creation.
Because a deep rift separates humans from God, one another, and creation, God’s human creatures suffer from a multiplicity of evils: war, disease, famine and starvation, chronic pain, depression, anxiety, rape, homicide, genocide, the loss of loved ones, and death. Creation itself is groaning and is in need of liberation. We must not be concerned merely with the question of why evil exists and why God allows it; we must also be concerned for the sufferer. Any theodicy, then, which seeks to answer the theological and philosophical problems brought on by evil in the world, must also address the existential problem of suffering.

As I have argued, it is precisely a theodicy grounded in the interpenetrating love relationship of the Triune God—a theodicy I have dubbed the “Trinitarian Perichoretic Theodicy” (TPT)—that provides not only a robust response to the philosophical and theological challenge of evil, but also a way forward in answering the existential problem from evil. As argued in Chapter Eight, what God sought to bring about was a dynamic and loving kingdom that was full of life, harmony, and peace and that was essentially relational. Such a kingdom does not require evil, nor does it require sin; but it does require a certain kind of freedom—freedom that resembles God’s own freedom. Though sin and moral evil is a product of the human abuse of freedom and rebellion, God does not leave it at that. God has responded to the evil in the world through the agency of His Son and through the agency of His Spirit. Through the death and resurrection of His Son, God conquered death; through the work and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, God has given His human creatures new life and power to overcome evil in the world. The church, empowered by the indwelling Spirit, is God’s instrument for bringing about change in the world in the here and now. God has called the church to a life of self-giving love—a love that reflects the very dynamic love relationship we see among the Persons of the Trinity. It is this kind of love that transforms a world that is full of evil, since such a love is at bottom
selfless, dynamic, and active, seeking out the best and good for the other. God’s work in the world will escalate until He fully brings about His kingdom—a kingdom where heaven and earth unite and God’s presence penetrates all of the created order. In this kingdom evil will be defeated. There will be no more sorrow, pain, or death. All wrongs will be righted and justice will prevail.

**Objections Considered**

Along with any new proposal, there will be some resistance, doubts, and loose ends that must be considered. In what follows I consider two potential objections to my proposal, though more could be considered. Given that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a central teaching of Christian theism, and since it is a central feature of this work, it is important that it can hold up to scrutiny with respect to its coherence.

There is more than one charge of incoherence that could be brought up against the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In what follows I consider two issues related to its coherence.

**The Problem of Monotheism**

First, I consider the problem of monotheism. How is it that a Christian can claim, on the one hand, that God is one, and yet, on the other, proclaim that He is three? Would not such an understanding preclude, mark a departure from, monotheism? Second, I consider a fuller charge of incoherence surrounding the problem of identity. How is it that the each of the divine Persons can be said to be God, and yet, each of the persons is not also identical to the others?

First, an objector might claim that the doctrine of the Trinity contradicts the very concept of monotheism. Take, for example, this Christian claim: The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Would not such a claim lead to something like tri-theism—the view that
three divine beings exist—instead of monotheism? Would not the acceptance of more than one
divine person contradict the Jewish understanding of monotheism? How might the Christian
theist respond?¹

To begin with, it may be helpful to consider just what it is that one means by
“monotheism.” Traditionally philosophers of religion have understood monotheism to mean
something like: there is only one God who exists and that this God alone is ultimate.² Yet, if not
careful, certain other expectations might be read into this understanding of God, such as any
being who is considered to be God must have a certain property X. In the case of Christian
theism, critics often assume that for some being to be classified as God, such a being must have
the characteristic or property of being only one person. Therefore, trying to understand Jesus and
the Holy Spirit as God would be a violation of basic monotheism, and especially Jewish
monotheism. But as recent investigations into early Judaism, particularly Second Temple
Judaism, have shown, we must be careful not to impose categories upon a Jewish understanding
of monotheism that were not necessarily a part of it, while at the same time we must allow that
some development has taken place in Jewish thinking as it pertains to monotheism. There has
been much in recent discussion on just what Jewish monotheism entails.³ Just what is it that sets
the God of Judaism apart from other deities?

¹ In this first part I will consider the question of monotheism. In the next section, I will focus more on the
question of unity between the divine Persons.

² For a discussion on various kinds of monotheistic views, see Keith Yandell, Philosophy of Religion: A

³ See especially Richard Bauckham, God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament
(Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998; idem, “Monotheism, and Christology in the Gospel of
B. Eerdmans, 2005 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 148-166; idem, Jesus and the God
of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity (Grand Rapids,
MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008); Larry W. Hurtado, One Lord, One God: Early Christian Devotion
In his work on monotheism during the Second Temple period, Larry Hurtado has argued that what set the God of Christians and Jews apart from other conceptions of deity in the ancient world was a radical devotion to and exclusive worship of this one God. Early Christians and Jews during this period held to a diversity of heavenly beings, “whom they regarded very positively, typically as part of the entourage of the one God (e.g., angels).” But these beings were not the recipients of worship. Hurtado contends that such devotion “means that the ‘God’ of the NT is posited, not as one among others, or as one member of a divine genus, but as sui generis, unique and solely worthy of worship.” Interestingly enough, within the New Testament documents, Jesus, claims Hurtado, received the same devotion that was reserved for God alone. Early on there was a binitarian shape to worship among Christians, which began after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Some of the earliest Christological materials in the New Testament are hymns and confessions embedded within the New Testament documents, giving primacy and devotion to Jesus (John 1:1-18; Rom 1:3-4; 3:24-26; 1 Cor 15:3-5; Gal 3:26-28; Eph. 5:14; Phil 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 1:3;).


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5 Ibid., 29.

6 Within the body of the New Testament, there are numerous creedal, hymnic, and confessional materials. These statements are often short, pithy statements; however, there are some longer statements, as well. In addition, theses early creedal and hymnic formulas were often used within a variety of settings and contexts, such as baptism, exorcism, worship, and instruction. The reason that such formulas are important to discussions in Christology is that the writers of the New Testament utilized these sources in developing their material. Thus such formulas predate the actual writings in which they are found. See Oscar Cullmann, _The Earliest Christian Confessions_, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 18-34; J. N. D. Kelly, _Early Christian Creeds_, 3rd ed. (Burnt Mill, UK:
Richard Bauckham, too, has done significant work in the area of Second Temple monotheism. Rather than focusing on either a “functional” or “ontic” Christology, as many biblical critics and theologians are often prone to do, Bauckham begins his investigation by working from within the category of, what he calls, “Christology of divine identity.” A Christology of divine identity, which was the Christology of the earliest Christian communities, “was already the highest Christology.” Making such distinctions as “ontic” and “functional,” Bauckham thinks, distorts our understanding of how the earliest Christians understood God and how they did their Christology. On this point, Bauckham asserts:

When we think in terms of divine identity, rather than divine essence or nature, which are not the primary categories for Jewish theology, we can see that the so-called divine functions which Jesus exercises are intrinsic to who God is. This Christology of divine identity is not a mere stage on the way to the patristic development of ontological Christology in the context of a Trinitarian theology. It is already a fully divine Christology, maintaining that Jesus Christ is intrinsic to the unique and eternal identity of God. The Fathers did not develop it so much as transpose it into a conceptual framework more concerned with the Greek philosophical categories of essence and nature.

There are two basic ways that one can approach monotheism during the Second Temple period. The first is to argue that the monotheism of the postexilic period was “strict” in such a way that it would have been “impossible to attribute real divinity to any figure other than the one

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8 Richard Bauckham, Jesus and the God of Israel, x.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.
God.”11 Within the context of Jewish monotheism, there is no way that Jesus could have ever been considered divine. The second is a “revisionist” approach to understanding Jewish monotheism during the Second Temple period. According to Bauckham, this second approach, which places focus on intermediary figures, such as principal angels, exalted patriarchs, and personification of divine attributes, tends toward blurring the distinction between the one true God and “all other reality.”12 Bauckham recognizes that both approaches are somewhat misguided. With the first view, Bauckham believes that Jewish monotheism is indeed strict. The Jews during the Second Temple period were self-consciously aware of their monotheistic beliefs, and, for them, there was a clear distinction between the one true God of Israel and all other reality. Despite an abundance of intermediary figures within the literature of postexilic Israel, and the fact that such figures had some relevance within the matrix of the Israelite worldview, it is a major point of contention as to whether such figures provide any key insight into the study of Christian origins. A high Christology developed within such a context not because the Jews applied to Jesus a “semi-divine intermediary status”13 but because they identified “Jesus directly with the one God of Israel.”14

According to Bauckham, what has been lacking in the whole discussion is a proper understanding of how the Jews during the Second Temple period understood the uniqueness of the true God of Israel. When a proper understanding of what made the God of Jewish monotheism unique is rightly considered, then can one appropriately assess and understand just

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11 Ibid., 2
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 3.
14 Ibid.
exactly what the early Christians were doing with Jesus when they included Him into the unique identity of the one true God of Israel. How, then, are we to understand “divine identity”?\footnote{15}{Ibid., 4.}

“Identity” is a term that Bauckham coined to describe his findings in the literature of the Second Temple period.\footnote{16}{It is important not to equivocate and confuse Bauckham’s use of “identity” with the philosophical notion of the “is” of identity (usually distinguished from the “is” of predication). As I discuss below, rather than making an identity claim, Bauckham is perhaps doing something more like making an “is” of predication claim despite his use of the word “identity,” that is to say, Jesus belongs to the category of divine. It is interesting to note that Jesus and the Spirit are rarely called “God” in the New Testament. Instead, and especially in the Pauline literature, the word “God” is generally reserved for the Father. But a bit more reflection on the New Testament formulas will reveal that New Testament authors had other ways of speaking of someone as divine. Paul most often uses the following triadic formula to speak of the divine Persons: Father = God; Son = Lord; Holy Spirit = Spirit (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 8:6; 12:4; 15:24-28; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; 4:4-6; Phil 1:2; 2:9-11; Col 1:2-3; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Philm 3). 1 Corinthians 8:6 is a significant passage in which Paul takes the Shema and reformulates it to account for both the Father and the Son: [Y]et for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (ESV) This passage takes place within the context of a discussion of idolatry. Paul is assuring the Corinthians that though there may be many “so-called” “gods” and “lords,” Christians serve one God and Lord, which is a reaffirmation of the Shema—as clear of an affirmation of monotheism as one can get—except in this context Paul is applying it (the Shema) to both the Father and the Son. Both the Father and the Son belong, to use Bauckham’s word, to the unique “identity” of the one true God.}

Yet, this presupposes that God was in some way “identifiable,” that is, this God had a unique identity. “Since the biblical God has a name and a character, since this God acts, speaks, relates, can be addressed and, in some sense, known, the analogy of human personal identity suggests itself as the category with which to synthesize the biblical and Jewish understanding of God,”\footnote{17}{Ibid., 6.} says Bauckham. This is not to say, however, that Jews were unconcerned with metaphysical statements about God. It is clear from some of the literature of the Second Temple period that certain writers, for example Josephus and Philo, adopted Greek

\footnote{18}{Ibid.}
metaphysical language and applied it to God. Moreover, one of those aspects which distinguish the true God from all other reality is the belief that He is eternal, which is a metaphysical statement about God. But this was not the predominant conceptual framework from which Jews during this time period worked out their understanding of God. They were not so much concerned with “what” deity is, but rather with “who” the one true God is. But what are those characteristics that distinguish the one true God from all other reality, including the gods of the nations?

Bauckham recognizes two sets of “identifying features” that distinguishes the God of Jewish monotheism. First, there are features which speak to God’s relationship to His people Israel. It was to Israel that God revealed His divine name, Yahweh. Moreover, it was Yahweh, the God of Israel, Who made a covenant with His people, Who delivered His people out of the hands of Egypt, and Who gave them a Law. The second set of identifying features—the set that Bauckham is most concerned about for his argument—focuses on how Israel’s God relates to the rest of creation. Concerning this second category, there are two underlying themes that are seen throughout the literature—that God is creator of and sovereign ruler over all things. It is these two distinguishing factors (being creator and sovereign) that set apart the God of Israel from all other reality, including the gods of the nations. As the sole creator and ruler over all of reality, God employs a variety of servants to do His bidding. He is envisioned in the Second Temple literature as the great and supreme emperor ruling over all of reality.\(^\text{19}\)

There is a third aspect that one must take into account in connection with God as creator and sovereign ruler—monolarity, the view that God alone should be worshipped. Unlike the

gentiles, who thought that one could worship a high god, and, yet, at the same time worship lesser deities, the Jews during the Second Temple period reserved worship for the one true God alone.\footnote{Bauckham and Hurtado are in agreement on this and find it to be a central feature of Jewish monotheism during the Second Temple period.}

When one takes these three aspects of Second Temple Judaism together, one can further differentiate between three main categories of Jewish monotheism: \textit{creational}, \textit{eschatological}, and \textit{cultic} monotheism. God alone is the sole creator of all reality. He accomplished this without help or advice from any other. Yet, stemming from this first category of \textit{creational} \textit{monotheism}, comes the second, \textit{eschatological} \textit{monotheism}, by which God, as the sole ruler over all creation will ultimately fulfill His promises, establish His eschatological kingdom, and make His Lordship known to the nations. Only the sole ruler and Lord over all things should be worshipped—this is the notion of \textit{cultic} \textit{monotheism}.\footnote{Ibid., 184.} What Bauckham finds striking is that the earliest Christians applied these same categories to Christ, making up, what he calls, \textit{Christological Monotheism}. Perhaps the strongest evidence of this is the widely used expression found in Psalm 110:1, in which Christ is seated on God’s cosmic throne (Phil 2:9-11; cf. Isa 45:22-23). Within the earliest Christian literature, Jesus is depicted as “the one who will achieve the eschatological lordship of God and in whom the unique sovereignty of the one God will be acknowledged by all,” and, moreover, he is “included in the unique rule of God over all things, and is thus placed unambiguously on the divine side of the absolute distinction that separates the only Sovereign One from all creation.”\footnote{Ibid.} God does not share His throne with any other. Yet, by taking a place on the cosmic throne of God, by participating in the sovereign rule and Lordship...
of God, and by receiving worship due to God alone, Christ was depicted in the earliest Christian literature as sharing in the unique identity of the one true God, and thus was given the highest status that could have possibly been given (Phil 2:6-11). The earliest Christians attributed to Jesus the highest Christology possible within the Jewish monotheistic context. Moreover, in the earliest Christian formulations, Jesus is seen, not only as sovereign ruler, but He is also depicted as Creator of all things (John 1:1-3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:2-3), which implies His pre-existence (Phil 2:6-8). Lastly, we see within the literature that Jesus is given the divine name (Phil 2:9).

Given studies like Hurtado’s and Bauckham’s, it would seem that Jewish monotheism can accommodate for more than one person within its overarching schema, especially given Bauckham’s notion of “identity.” Holding to a concept of a tri-personal God in no way contradicts the concept of Jewish monotheism, unless, of course, one loads upfront what monotheism means and insists on saying more than what those during Second Temple Judaism would say. The early church, then, found themselves with the task of translating ideas and concepts from one way of thinking to another. It is precisely because of what they found within the pages of the Scriptures that the early Fathers of the church wrestled through working out a formula that faithfully expressed their findings, yet doing so in such a way that that expressed the language and concepts found within the matrix of their own religious and cultural contexts.

The Problem of Identity

Suppose there is room within Jewish monotheism for something like more than one person belonging to the unique identity of the one true God, there is still yet another problem that

23 Ibid.
critics raise—the problem of identity. \(^{24}\) How is it that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are understood by Christians to be identical? After all, The Father is God, The Son is God, and The Holy Spirit is God. Would not this imply that the Father is identical to the Son and to the Spirit, which is an apparent contradiction?

In order to answer this it will be helpful to consider the aforementioned distinction between the “is” of identity and the “is” of predication. When speaking of the “is” of identity, one aims at asserting that some object or person can be understood in at least two ways. For example, Ronnie Campbell is the father of Abby, Caedmon, and Caleb or Superman is Clark Kent. In each case, one could insert the words “the same thing as” or the “same person as.” The “is” of predication, on the other hand, is used to express that whatever is located on the left side of the equation has the property of that which appears on the right. “Superman is superhuman,” “Jack is furry,” and “Caspian is feline” are all examples of the “is” of predication. \(^{25}\)

With respect to God, then, what is it that Christians are claiming? If by “is God” the Christian had something like the “is” of identity in mind, then she would be caught in a contradiction, since it would follow that the Father is identical with the Son and with the Spirit; however, if she takes “is God” to mean something like the “is” of predication, then she is saying something more along the lines of person P “is divine,” which would be much less thorny of an issue when it comes identity. But the Christian is not yet clear. It seems that for Christians to predicate of each of the persons “divinity” would render them susceptible to the charge of tritheism, the heretical view that three gods exist. Moreover, such a view would clearly contradict

\(^{24}\) Here, again it must be emphasized that we should not equivocate on Bauchkam’s use of “identity” with how philosophers usually intend it.

the Christian adherence to monotheism (that only one God exists). Prima facie Christians are stuck with the following juxtaposition: God is one and God is three. But the critic will point out that nothing can be both exactly one thing and three things without holding to a view that is logically incoherent. The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is logically incoherent. But as Thomas Senor as rightly suggested: “When the creeds say that God is three and yet one, they should not be understood as asserting that God is three and one of the same thing. That would be contradictory and obviously so. Rather, what is being claimed is that there is an important unity in the godhead as well as plurality.”

Christians have long recognized the tension between the three-ness and the one-ness of the Trinity. Steering too much toward the three-ness leads to tri-theism; steering too much toward the one-ness leads to modalism—the view that God manifests Himself in different modes of existence (at one time the Father and at another the Son or the Spirit). Both views were rejected by the early church as being heretical. So, how might the Christian make sense of the unity and plurality within the Trinity?

Traditionally Christians have put it this way: God as being three individuals (hypostases) or persons (personae) in one substance (homoousios). Thomas Torrance expresses the classical Christian understanding of the Trinity in the following way:

In our understanding of the New Testament witness to God’s revelation of himself, ‘the Father’, ‘the Son’, and ‘the Holy Spirit’ are unique and proper names denoting three distinct Persons or real Hypostases who are neither exchangeable nor interchangeable while nevertheless of one and the same divine Being. There is one Person of the Father who is always the Father, distinct from the Son and the Spirit; and there is another Person of the Son who is always the Son, distinct from the Father and the Spirit; and another Person of the

26 Ibid., 255-256.
27 Ibid., 256.
Holy Spirit who is always the Holy Spirit, distinct from the Father and the Son. In this threefold tri-personal self-revelation of God one Person is not more or less God, for all three Persons are coeternal and coequal. They are all perfectly one in the identity of their Nature and perfectly homoousial or consubstantial in their Being. Each of the three Persons is himself Lord and God, and there is only one and the same eternal Being of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity of three divine Persons is thus perfectly homogeneous and unitary, both in the threeness and oneness of God’s personal activity, and in the threeness and oneness of his eternal unchangeable personal Being. *Three Persons, one Being.*

Though Christians speak of the three persons as distinct, that must not be confused with separateness. As Torrance further explains, “No divine Person is who he is without essential relation to the other two, and yet each divine Person is other than and distinct from the other two.” In this sense, then, it is this relatedness of each divine Person to the other divine Persons that constitutes what and who They are. The Father cannot be the Father apart from His relation to the Son and the Spirit, and the Son cannot be the Son apart from His relation to the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit cannot be the Spirit apart from His relation to the Father and the Son. “The relations between the divine Persons are not just modes of existence,” explains Torrance, “but hypostatic interrelations which belong intrinsically to what Father, Son and Holy Spirit are coinherently in themselves and in their mutual objective relations with and for one another.”

Thus when thinking of the doctrine of the Trinity, Christians cannot think of God apart from the interrelatedness of the three Persons. If one of the persons were absent, then we would not have the Christian God but something like ditheism.

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30 Ibid., 157.

31 Ibid.
What is it, then, that constitutes the unity between the divine Persons? Here, something like the doctrine of perichoresis might provide a way forward. Before considering perichoresis as it relates to my proposal, it may first be helpful to consider Social Trinitarianism.

There are two main views on the doctrine of the Trinity—the so-called Latin view (LT) and the so-called Social Trinitarian view (ST). I will not here defend either view, since this is an “in-house” debate. For now I will assume something like the ST view is true in order to defend against the charge of incoherence.

ST begins with the three-ness of God instead of God’s oneness. Most versions of ST hold to each of the three Persons as existing as a society or community (perhaps a better understanding is that God is community-like) and each having something like a generic divine nature. The notion of Person for defenders of ST carries the idea of having a distinct mind and will or distinct center of consciousness. The word “God” then carries the notion of “the Godhead.”

In order to explain their version of ST, William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland use the example of the Greco-Roman mythological creature, Cerberus. Cerberus is a dog-like creature who has three heads. Given that Cerberus has three heads, we may assume that it has three brains with three distinct centers of consciousness. Yet because of its biology we might also assume that there is no one center of consciousness, which would indicate that in order for Cerberus to


function properly it would require a significant amount of cooperation between each of the minds. Despite there being three distinct heads with three centers of consciousness, given that it is a single biological entity we would still think that there is only one dog-creature, so say the authors. To flesh this out a bit more, the authors assign to each of the heads the following names: Bowser, Rover, and Spike. They then give the example of Hercules attempting to enter Hades and one of the heads, Spike, snarled at him in the act. In such a case, they explain, Hercules could accurately report that Cerberus snarled at him. They then ask their readers to suppose further that Cerberus is not merely canine, but has minds much like our own, endowed with rationality and self-consciousness, and each of the heads has personal agency. Would we not, then, have something like a tri-personal being? If Cerberus were to die in battle and its soul were to persist in the afterlife, might not we have something like what is pictured in the Trinity prior to the incarnation—three unembodied distinct centers of consciousness united as one being? The authors take it that God is a soul or is soul-like. Here we would have not one person; rather, we would have one being (a soul) with three distinct centers of consciousness.\footnote{William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, \textit{Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 593.} Does this model of ST work?

I find Craig and Moreland’s proposed analogy appealing, allowing for the “three-in-one” model that ST Trinitarians hold; however, I would like to bolster their view with some reflection on the doctrine of perichoresis.

In working through his own model of the Trinity, which he calls “perichoretic monotheism,” Stephen Davis suggests the following are needed to show the Trinity to be a single individual (unity):
(1) Each of the Persons equally possesses the divine essence in its totality. (2) The three necessarily share a marvelous unity of purpose, will, and action; that is, it is not possible for them to disagree or to be in conflict. (3) They exist in perichoresis (circumincession, co-inherence, permeation). That is, each is ‘in’ the others; each ontologically embraces the others; to be a divine Person is by nature to be in relation to the other two; the boundaries between them are transparent; their love for and communion with each other is such that they can be said to ‘interpenetrate’ each other.35

Davis has provided a helpful grid for working through an ST understanding of the Trinity. One of the chief difficulties when working through this doctrine, and particularly the ST version, is that it would seem we have something like four individuals: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and the Godhead. Getting back to our earlier distinction between the “is” of identity and the “is” of predication, the defender of ST will want to suggest that what is taking place is the “is” of predication. In other words, “God” is a reference to the divine essence (1). When we speak of “God,” there is a sense in which we have in mind a single being. That is not disputed; however, it must remain clear that it is more accurate to speak of God as personal rather than saying that God is a person. When the defender of ST says “God” has done X, she means that the entire Godhead (or, perhaps, one of the divine Persons) has accomplished X.

Davis’s emphasis on perichoresis (3) allows the defender of ST to accommodate for the greater unity between the persons lacking in the Craig and Moreland analogy. Not only do each of the Persons share a divine essence, each divine Person is completely open up to and penetrates the other Persons. It is a moving toward the other in divine love. Thomas Torrance provides a helpful portrait of what this perichoretic love looks like within the Trinity:

When we turn to the First Epistle of St John we learn that ‘God is Love’, and that this Love is defined by the Love that God bears to us in sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, and indeed for the sins of the world. That is to say, the very Being of God as Love is identical with his loving, for he is himself the Love with which he loves; his Being and his Act are one and the same. This very love that God is, therefore, is identical with Jesus Christ who laid down his life for us, and who in his own Being and Act as the Son of the Father embodies the Love of God. The self-giving of the Son in sacrificial love and the self-giving

35 Stephen T. Davis, Christian Philosophical Theology, 61.
of the Father in sacrificial love are not separable from one another, for the Father and the Son dwell in one another, together with the Spirit of God, whom we know through his witness to the Son, and through whose dwelling in us God dwells in us. This means that we are to understand the Love that God is in his being-in-act and his act-in-being in a Trinitarian way. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who indwell One Another in the Love that God is constitute the Communion of Love or the movement of reciprocal Loving which is identical with the One Being of God. It is as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit that God is God and God is Love. As one Being, three Persons, the Being of God is to be understood as an eternal movement of Love, both in himself as the Love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for one Another, and in his loving Self-giving to others beyond himself.³⁶

Divine Love, as Torrance explains, does not involve merely God’s being or merely His act but God’s “being-in-act” or “act-in-being.” It is precisely this dynamic and active eternal movement toward the other—being-in-act, which Torrance borrows from Barth—that makes the unity. It is also this perichoretic love relationship between the Persons that allows for a complete knowing of the Other because of the interpenetration and mutual indwelling of that relationship. The intimate knowledge between the Father, Son, and Spirit is nothing like anything a created being can experience. Each of the Persons of the divine Trinity knows the others intimately. It is such an intimacy that a divine Person is completed by the other Persons, so much so that He cannot be Himself apart from Them. Yet, the knowledge that the divine Person experiences is not merely a complete intimate knowing of the divine Self in relation to the Others, but a complete knowing of the Others as They exist in relation to one another. Here we might think of it as something like omnisubjectivity, whereby each divine Person shares fully His mental states with the other divine Persons—complete and total vulnerability.³⁷


³⁷ For an interesting discussion on the possiblity of divine omnisubjectivity, see Linda Zagzebski, “Omnisubjectivity,” in Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion: vol. 1, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 231-248. Zagzebski uses the sense of omnisubjectivity quite differently than how I am suggesting it here. Her version has to do with whether God has something like omnisubjectivity as it relates to His knowledge of His creatures. I am taking it only in the sense of how each of the divine Persons might know the other divine Persons.
Given the above, I suggest that we understand God, in God’s essential nature, as three distinct (but not separate) unembodied centers of consciousness, all of whom are personal agents, having something like an intellect, emotion, and will of their own. The Persons are co-equal, sharing fully those properties of the divine nature, while existing eternally in divine perichoretic and interpenetrating relationship. This perichoretic relationship allows for full and complete unity and for each of the Persons fully to indwell, embrace, and intimately know the Other. The giving up of the divine Self to the divine Other reassures that all of the acts of the divine Trinity are one. Taking something like the above understanding of the Trinity answers, to my satisfaction, the critic’s charge of incoherence based on identity.

Where to Go From Here?

This project was as much about methodology as it was about arguing for a particular position. My goal from the beginning was integrative. There is much that philosophers, theologians, and biblical theologians can learn from one another. As a Christian community we need to provide a united front, especially as we engage such a difficult issue as that of the problem from evil.

Philosophers are challenged with providing a more robust response to the problem from evil, one that gets away from a generic theistic understanding of God, to one that gives more focus to the particulars of Christian theism. Theologians and biblical theologians are challenged with the task of becoming more attuned to subtleties in arguments, concepts, and distinctions. It is my hope that this work will motivate more dialogue between the various disciplines, seeking

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38 For clarification, one of the divine Persons—the divine Son—has taken on and is united to a human nature, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, which means that the Son now has a human body. While the incarnation was necessary for our human salvation, it is not an essential property for deity to have, and thus is a contingent feature of the Son of God. Hence we may then speak of God, in God’s essential nature, as three unembodied minds.
ways to integrate the best of our disciplines into a more coherent and cohesive understanding of our shared worldview.

Furthermore, I have sought to show that the Christian worldview provides fertile ground for thinking about how one might answer the problem from evil. Within our own worldview, there are many areas and avenues that need further exploration, including but not limited to the following key doctrines: the doctrine of the Trinity, creation, salvation, sin, incarnation, pneumatology, and eschatology. The Christian Scriptures themselves provide for us the raw data for working out a more thorough and robust theodicy.

This work also sought to provide a response to both the philosophical/theological and existential/religious problems from evil. Any adequate theodicy should meet both demands. It is my contention that reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity gives us the tools and resources for answering both. The ultimate goal of theological reflection is praxis. Theology, as well as philosophy, speaks to every area of life. It is my hope that this work has done just that as I have considered the problem of evil in the world.

“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Rev 7:15-17, ESV)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’” (Rev 21:1-4, ESV)


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