GOD, FREEDOM, and EVIL

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Introduction

This book discusses and exemplifies the philosophy of religion, or philosophical reflection on central themes of religion. Philosophical reflection (which is not much different from just thinking hard) on these themes has a long history: it dates back at least as far as the fifth century B.C. when some of the Greeks thought long and hard about the religion they had received from their ancestors. In the Christian era such philosophical reflection begins in the first or second century with the early church fathers, or "Patristics" as they are often called; it has continued ever since.

The heart of many of the major religions—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, for example—is belief in God. Of course these religions—*theistic* religions—differ among themselves as to how they conceive of God. The Christian tradition, for example, emphasizes God's love and benevolence; in the Moslem view, on the other hand, God has a somewhat more arbitrary character. There are also supersophisticates among allegedly Christian theologians who proclaim the liberation of Christianity from belief in God, seeking to replace it by trust in "Being itself" or the "Ground of Being" or some such thing. But for the most part it remains true that belief in God is the foundation of these great religions.

Now belief *in* God is not the same thing as belief that God exists, or that there *is* such a thing as God. To believe that God exists is simply to accept a proposition of a certain sort—a proposition affirming that there is a personal being who, let's say, has existed from eternity, is almighty, perfectly wise, perfectly just, has created the world, and loves his creatures. To believe *in* God, however, is quite another matter. The Apostle's Creed begins thus: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth. . . ." One who repeats these words and means what he says is not simply announcing the fact that he accepts a certain proposition as true; much more is involved than that. Belief in God means *trusting* God, accepting Him, committing one's life to Him. To the believer the entire world looks different. Blue sky, verdant forests, great mountains, surging ocean, friends and family, love in its many forms and various manifestations—the believer sees these things as gifts from God. The entire universe takes on a personal cast for him; the fundamental truth about reality is truth about a *Person.* So believing in God is more than accepting the proposition that God exists. Still, it is at least that much. One can't sensibly believe in God and thank Him for the mountains without believing that there *is* such a person to be thanked, and that He is in some way responsible for the mountains. Nor can one trust in God and commit oneself to Him without believing that He exists: "He who would come to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him" (Heb. 11: 6).

One important aspect of philosophy of religion concerns this latter belief—the belief that God exists, that there really is a being of the sort theists claim to worship and trust. This belief, however, has not been universally accepted. Many have rejected it; some have claimed that it is plainly false and that it is irrational to accept it. By way of response some theologians and theistic philosophers have tried to give successful arguments or *proofs* for the existence of God. This enterprise is called *natural theology.* The natural theologian does not, typically, offer his arguments in order to convince people of God's existence; and in fact few who accept theistic belief do so because they find such an argument compelling. Instead the typical function of natural theology has been to show that religious belief is rationally acceptable. Other philosophers, of course, have presented arguments for the *falsehood* of theistic beliefs;

these philosophers conclude that belief in God is demonstrably irrational or unreasonable. We might call this enterprise *natural atheology.*

One area of philosophy of religion, then, inquires into the rational acceptability of theistic belief. Here we examine the arguments of natural theology and natural atheology. We ask whether any of these arguments are successful and whether any provides either proof of or evidence for its conclusion. Of course this topic is not the only one in philosophy of religion, but it is an important one and one upon which this book will concentrate.

Of course this topic—the rationality of theistic belief—is not restricted to philosophy or philosophers. It plays a prominent role in literature—in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example, as well as in Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov,* and in some of Thomas Hardy's novels. This same theme may be found in the works of many more recent authors—for example, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, Peter De Vries, and, perhaps, John Updike. And it may be difficult, if not impossible, to give a clear and useful definition of the philosophical, as opposed, say, to the literary way of approaching this theme. It is also unnecessary. A much better way to get a feel for the philosophical approach is to examine some representative samples. This book is such a sample. In discussing subjects of natural theology and natural atheology I shall not adopt a pose of fine impartiality; instead I shall comment in detail on some of the main points and spell out what appears to me to be the truth of the matter. But I shall not try to say something about every important argument or about every topic that arises in connection with those I do discuss; to do that would be to say much too little about any. Instead I shall concentrate my comments upon just two of the traditional arguments: the ontological argument as an example of natural theology and the problem of evil as the most important representative of natural atheology. (What I have to say on some of the remaining topics and arguments can be found in *God and Other Minds* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967].) I believe that some recently won insights in the philosophy of logic—particularly those centering about the idea of *possible worlds*—genuinely illumine these classical topics; a moderately innovative feature of this book, therefore, is my attempt to show how these insights throw light upon these topics. Much of the material developed in this book can be found in more rigorous and complete form in my book *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974).

I have tried to put what I have to say in a way that is philosophically accurate and responsible; but I have tried especially hard to put it as clearly and simply as the subject allows. These great topics are of interest and concern to many—not just professional philosophers and theologians. So I hope this book will be useful to the philosophical novice and to the fabled general reader. All it will require, I hope, is a determination to follow the argument and a willingness to think hard about its various steps.

PART I

NATURAL ATHEOLOGY

a The Problem of Evil

Suppose we begin with what I have called natural atheology—the attempt to prove that God does not exist or that at any rate it is unreasonable or irrational to believe that He does. Perhaps the most widely accepted and impressive piece of natural atheology has to do with the so-called problem of evil. Many philosophers believe that the existence of evil constitutes a difficulty for the theist, and many believe that the existence of evil (or at least the amount and kinds of evil we actually find) makes belief in God unreasonable or rationally unacceptable.

The world does indeed contain a great deal of evil, some of which is catalogued by David Hume:

> But though these external insults, said Demea, from animals, from men, from all the elements, which assault us form a frightful catalogue of woes, they are nothing in comparison of those which arise within ourselves, from the distempered condition of our mind and body. How many lie under the lingering torment of diseases? Hear the pathetic enumeration of the great poet.
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> *Intestine stone and ulcer, colic-pangs,*
> *Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy,*
> *And moon-struck madness, pining atrophy,*
> *Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence.*
> *Dire was the tossing, deep the groans:* Despair
> *Tended the sick, busiest from couch to couch.*

> *And over them triumphant* Death *his dart*
> *Shook: but delay'd to strike, though oft invok'd*
> *With vows, as their chief good and final hope.*

> The disorders of the mind, continued Demea, though more secret, are not perhaps less dismal and vexatious. Remorse, shame, anguish, rage, disappointment, anxiety, fear, dejection, despair—who has ever passed through life without cruel inroads from these tormentors? How many have scarcely ever felt any better sensations? Labor and poverty, so abhorred by everyone, are the certain lot of the far greater number; and those few privileged persons who enjoy ease and opulence never reach contentment or true felicity. All the goods of life united would not make a very happy man, but all the ills united would make a wretch indeed; and any one of them almost (and who can be free from every one), nay, often the absence of one good (and who can possess all) is sufficient to render life ineligible.[1]

In addition to "natural" evils such as earthquakes, tidal waves, and virulent diseases there are evils that result from human stupidity, arrogance, and cruelty. Some of these are described in painfully graphic detail in Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov:*

> "A Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow," Ivan went on, seeming not to hear his brother's words, "told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fences, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them—all sorts of things you can't imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that's all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from the mother's womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mother's eyes. Doing it before the mother's eyes was what gave zest to the amusement. Here is

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[1] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* ed Nelson Pike (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1970), pt. X, pp. 84–85. The "great poet" referred to is John Milton, and the quotation is from *Paradise Lost,* bk. XI.

> another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They've planned a diversion; they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out his little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn't it? By the way, Turks are particularly fond of sweet things, they say."[2]

There is also the suffering and savagery that go with war. Perhaps one of the worst features of war is the way in which it brutalizes those who take part in it. Commenting on the trial of Lt. William Calley, who was accused of taking part in the 1969 American massacre of unarmed civilians at My Lai, a young soldier said, "How can they punish Calley? They send us over here to kill dinks. Our job is to kill dinks. How can they punish him for that?" One who speaks in this way has indeed become brutish. Socrates once said that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it—better to be victim than perpetrator. Perhaps he's right; perhaps one who has become as morally callous and insensitive as that comment reveals has lost something more precious than life itself.

1. *The Question: Why Does God Permit Evil?*

So the world obviously contains a great deal of evil. Now the atheological discussion often begins with a question. If God is as benevolent as Christian theists claim, He must be just as appalled as we are at all this evil. But if He is also as powerful as they claim, then presumably He is in a position to do something about it. So why does He permit it? Why doesn't He arrange things so that these evils don't occur? That should have been easy enough for one as powerful as He. As Hume puts it:

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[2] Fyodor Dostoevski, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, 1933), pp. 245–246.

> Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?

and

> Why is there any misery at all in the world? Not by chance, surely. From some cause, then. It is from the intention of the deity? But he is perfectly benevolent. Is it contrary to his intention? But he is almighty. Nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive. . . .[3]

So Hume insists on this question: if God is perfectly benevolent and also omnipotent, or almighty, why is there any evil in the world? Why does he permit it?

Now one reply would be to specify God's reason for permitting evil or for creating a world that contained evil. (Perhaps evil is necessary, in some way, to the existence of good.) Such an answer to Hume's question is sometimes called a *theodicy.* When a theist answers the question "Whence evil?" or "Why does God permit evil?" he is giving a theodicy. And, of course, a theist might like to have a theodicy, an answer to the question why God permits evil. He might want very badly to know why God permits evil in general or some particular evil—the death or suffering of someone close to him, or perhaps his own suffering. But suppose none of the suggested theodicies is very satisfactory. Or suppose that the theist admits he just doesn't know why God permits evil. What follows from that? Very little of interest. Why suppose that if God *does* have a good reason for permitting evil, the theist would be the first to know? Perhaps God has a good reason, but that reason is too complicated for us to understand. Or perhaps He has not revealed it for some other reason. The fact that the theist doesn't know why God permits evil is, perhaps, an interesting fact about the theist, but by itself it shows little or nothing relevant to the rationality of belief in God. Much more is needed for the atheological argument even to get off the ground.

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[3] Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* pt. X, pp. 88, 91.

Perhaps we can see this as follows. The theist believes that God has a reason for permitting evil; he doesn't know what that reason *is*. But why should that mean that his belief is improper or irrational? Take an analogy. I believe that there is a connection of some sort between Paul's deciding to mow the lawn and the complex group of bodily movements involved in so doing. But *what* connection, exactly? Does his decision *cause* these bodily movements? If so, how? The decision may take place long before he so much as sets foot on the lawn. Is there an intermediary causal chain extending between the decision and the first of these movements? If so, what sorts of events make up this chain and how is the decision related, let's say, to the first event in it? Does it *have* a first event? And there are whole series of bodily motions involved in mowing the lawn. Is his decision related in the same way to each of these motions? Exactly what is the relation between his deciding to mow the lawn—which decision does not seem to be a bodily event at all—and his actually doing so? No one, I suspect, knows the answer to these questions. But does it follow that it is irrational or unreasonable to believe that this decision has something to do with that series of motions? Surely not. In the same way the theist's not knowing why God permits evil does not by itself show that he is irrational in thinking that God does indeed have a reason. To make out his case, therefore, the atheologian cannot rest content with asking embarrassing questions to which the theist does not know the answer. He must do more—he might try, for example, to show that it is *impossible* or anyhow unlikely that God should have a reason for permitting evil. Many philosophers—for example, some of the French Encyclopedists, J. S. Mill, F. H. Bradley, and many others—have claimed that there is a *contradiction* involved in asserting, as the theist does, that God is perfectly good, omnipotent (i.e., all-powerful), and omniscient (i.e., all-knowing) on the one hand, and, on the other, that there is evil.

2. *Does the Theist Contradict Himself?*

In a widely discussed piece entitled "Evil and Omnipotence" John Mackie repeats this claim:

> I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are *inconsistent* with one another. . . .[4]

Is Mackie right? Does the theist contradict himself? But we must ask a prior question: just what is being claimed here? That theistic belief contains an inconsistency or contradiction, of course. But what, exactly, is an inconsistency or contradiction? There are several kinds. An *explicit* contradiction is a *proposition* of a certain sort—a conjunctive proposition, one conjunct of which is the denial or negation of the other conjunct. For example:

Paul is a good tennis player, and it's false that Paul is a good tennis player.

(People seldom assert explicit contradictions). Is Mackie charging the theist with accepting such a contradiction? Presumably not; what he says is:

> In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three.[5]

According to Mackie, then, the theist accepts a group or set of three propositions; this set is inconsistent. Its members, of course, are

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[4] John Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in *The Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p 92.

[5] Ibid., pp. 92–93.

(1) God is omnipotent
(2) God is wholly good

and

(3) Evil exists.

Call this set A; the claim is that A is an inconsistent set. But what is it for a *set* to be inconsistent or contradictory? Following our definition of an explicit contradiction, we might say that a set of propositions is explicitly contradictory if one of the members is the denial or negation of another member. But then, of course, it is evident that the set we are discussing is not explicitly contradictory; the denials of (1), (2), and (3), respectively are

(1′) God is not omnipotent (or it's false that God is omnipotent)
(2′) God is not wholly good

and

(3′) There is no evil

none of which are in set A.

Of course many sets are pretty clearly contradictory, in an important way, but not *explicitly* contradictory. For example, set B:

(4) If all men are mortal, then Socrates is mortal
(5) All men are mortal
(6) Socrates is not mortal.

This set is not explicitly contradictory; yet surely *some* significant sense of that term applies to it. What is important here is that by using only the rules of ordinary logic—the laws of propositional logic and quantification theory found in any introductory text on the subject—we can deduce an explicit contradiction from the set. Or to put it differently, we can use the laws of logic to deduce a proposition from the set, which proposition, when added to the set, yields a new set that is explicitly contradictory. For by using the law *modus ponens* (if *p*, then *q*; *p*; therefore *q*) we can deduce

(7) Socrates is mortal

from (4) and (5). The result of adding (7) to B is the set {(4), (5), (6), (7)}. This set, of course, is explicitly contradictory in that (6) is the denial of (7). We might say that any set which shares this characteristic with set B is *formally* contradictory. So a formally contradictory set is one from whose members an explicit contradiction can be deduced by the laws of logic. Is Mackie claiming that set A is formally contradictory?

If he is, he's wrong. No laws of logic permit us to deduce the denial of one of the propositions in A from the other members. Set A isn't formally contradictory either.

But there is still another way in which a set of propositions can be contradictory or inconsistent. Consider set C, whose members are

> **(8) George is older than Paul**
> **(9) Paul is older than Nick**

and

> **(10) George is not older than Nick.**

This set is neither explicitly nor formally contradictory; we can't, just by using the laws of logic, deduce the denial of any of these propositions from the others. And yet there is a good sense in which it is inconsistent or contradictory. For clearly it is *not possible* that its three members all be true. It is *necessarily true* that

> **(11) If George is older than Paul, and Paul is older than Nick, then George is older than Nick.**

And if we add (11) to set C, we get a set that is formally contradictory; (8), (9), and (11) yield, by the laws of ordinary logic, the denial of (10).

I said that (11) is *necessarily true;* but what does *that* mean? Of course we might say that a proposition is necessarily true if it is impossible that it be false, or if its negation is not possibly true. This would be to explain necessity in terms of possibility. Chances are, however, that anyone who does not know what necessity is, will be equally at a loss about possibility; the explanation is not likely to be very successful. Perhaps all we can do by way of explanation is give some examples and hope for the best. In the first place many propositions can be established by the laws of logic alone—for example

(12) **If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal.**

Such propositions are truths of logic; and all of them are necessary in the sense of question. But truths of arithmetic and mathematics generally are also necessarily true. Still further, there is a host of propositions that are neither truths of logic nor truths of mathematics but are nonetheless necessarily true; (11) would be an example, as well as

(13) **Nobody is taller than himself**
(14) **Red is a color**
(15) **No numbers are persons**
(16) **No prime number is a prime minister**

and

(17) **Bachelors are unmarried.**

So here we have an important kind of necessity—let's call it "broadly logical necessity." Of course there is a correlative kind of *possibility:* a proposition *p* is possibly true (in the broadly logical sense) just in case its negation or denial is not necessarily true (in that same broadly logical sense). This sense of necessity and possibility must be distinguished from another that we may call *causal* or *natural* necessity and possibility. Consider

(18) **Henry Kissinger has swum the Atlantic.**

Although this proposition has an implausible ring, it is not necessarily false in the broadly logical sense (and its denial is not necessarily true in that sense). But there is a good sense in which it is impossible: it is *causally* or *naturally* impossible. Human beings, unlike dolphins, just don't have the physical equipment demanded for this feat. Unlike Superman, furthermore, the rest of us are incapable of leaping tall buildings at a single bound or (without auxiliary power of some kind) traveling faster than a speeding bullet. These things are *impossible* for us—but not *logically* impossible, even in the broad sense.

So there are several senses of necessity and possibility here. There are a number of propositions, furthermore, of which it's difficult to say whether they are or aren't possible in the broadly logical sense; some of these are subjects of philosophical controversy. Is it possible, for example, for a person never to be conscious during his entire existence? Is it possible for a (human) person to exist *disembodied?* If that's possible, is it possible that there be a person who *at no time at all* during his entire existence has a body? Is it possible to see without eyes? These are propositions about whose possibility in that broadly logical sense there is disagreement and dispute.

Now return to set C (p. 14). What is characteristic of it is the fact that the conjunction of its members—the proposition expressed by the result of putting "and's" between (8), (9), and (10)—is necessarily false. Or we might put it like this: what characterizes set C is the fact that we can get a formally contradictory set by adding a necessarily true proposition—namely (11). Suppose we say that a set is *implicitly contradictory* if it resembles C in this respect. That is, a set *S* of propositions is implicitly contradictory if there is a necessary proposition *p* such that the result of adding *p* to *S* is a formally contradictory set. Another way to put it: *S* is implicitly contradictory if there is some necessarily true proposition *p* such that by using just the laws of ordinary logic, we can deduce an explicit contradiction from *p* together with the members of *S*. And when Mackie says that set A is contradictory, we may properly take him, I think, as holding that it is implicitly contradictory in the explained sense. As he puts it:

> However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms "good" and "evil" and "omnipotent." These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.[6]

Here Mackie refers to "additional premises"; he also calls them "additional principles" and "quasi-logical rules"; he says we need them to show the contradiction. What he means, I think, is that to get a formally contradictory set we must add some more propositions to set A; and if we aim to show that set A is implicitly contradictory, these propositions must be necessary truths—"quasi-logical rules" as Mackie calls them. The two additional principles he suggests are

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[6] Ibid., p 93.

> (19) **A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can**

and

> (20) **There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.**

And, of course, if Mackie means to show that set A is implicitly contradictory, then he must hold that (19) and (20) are not merely *true* but *necessarily true*.

But, are they? What about (20) first? What does it mean to say that a being is omnipotent? That he is *all-powerful*, or *almighty*, presumably. But are there no limits *at all* to the power of such a being? Could he create square circles, for example, or married bachelors? Most theologians and theistic philosophers who hold that God is omnipotent, do not hold that He can create round squares or bring it about that He both exists and does not exist. These theologians and philosophers may hold that there are no *nonlogical* limits to what an omnipotent being can do, but they concede that not even an omnipotent being can bring about logically impossible states of affairs or cause necessarily false propositions to be true. Some theists, on the other hand—Martin Luther and Descartes, perhaps—have apparently thought that God's power is unlimited even by the laws of logic. For these theists the question whether set A is contradictory will not be of much interest. As theists they believe (1) and (2), and they also, presumably, believe (3). But they remain undisturbed by the claim that (1), (2), and (3) are jointly inconsistent—because, as they say, God can do what is logically impossible. Hence He can bring it about that the members of set A are all true, even if that set is contradictory (concentrating very intensely upon this suggestion is likely to make you dizzy). So the theist who thinks that the power of God isn't limited *at all*, not even by the laws of logic, will be unimpressed by Mackie's argument and won't find any difficulty in the contradiction set A is alleged to contain. This view is not very popular, however, and for good reason; it is quite incoherent. What the theist typically means when he says that God is omnipotent is not that there are *no* limits to God's power, but at most that there are no nonlogical limits to what He can do; and given this qualification, it is perhaps initially plausible to suppose that (20) is necessarily true.

But what about (19), the proposition that every good thing eliminates every evil state of affairs that it can eliminate? Is that necessarily true? Is it true at all? Suppose, first of all, that your friend Paul unwisely goes for a drive on a wintry day and runs out of gas on a deserted road. The temperature dips to – 10°, and a miserably cold wind comes up. You are sitting comfortably at home (twenty-five miles from Paul) roasting chestnuts in a roaring blaze. Your car is in the garage; in the trunk there is the full five-gallon can of gasoline you always keep for emergencies. Paul's discomfort and danger are certainly an evil, and one which you could eliminate. You don't do so. But presumably you don't thereby forfeit your claim to being a "good thing"—you simply didn't know of Paul's plight. And so (19) does not appear to be necessary. It says that every good thing has a certain property—the property of eliminating every evil that it can. And if the case I described is possible—a good person's failing through ignorance to eliminate a certain evil he can eliminate—then (19) is by no means necessarily true.

But perhaps Mackie could sensibly claim that if you *didn't know* about Paul's plight, then in fact you were *not*, at the time in question, able to eliminate the evil in question; and perhaps he'd be right. In any event he could revise (19) to take into account the kind of case I mentioned:

> **(19a) Every good thing always eliminates every evil that *it knows about* and can eliminate.**

{(1), (2), (3), (20), (19a)}, you'll notice, is not a formally contradictory set—to get a formal contradiction we must add a proposition specifying that God *knows about* every evil state of affairs. But most theists do believe that God is omniscient or all-knowing; so if this new set—the set that results when we add to set A the proposition that God is omniscient—is implicitly contradictory then Mackie should be satisfied and the theist confounded. (And, henceforth, set A will be the old set A together with the proposition that God is omniscient.)

But is (19a) necessary? Hardly. Suppose you know that Paul is marooned as in the previous example, and you also know another friend is similarly marooned fifty miles in the opposite direction. Suppose, furthermore, that while you can rescue one or the other, you simply can't rescue both. Then each of the two evils is such that it is within your power to eliminate it; and you know about them both. But you can't eliminate *both;* and you don't forfeit your claim to being a good person by eliminating only one—it wasn't within your power to do more. So the fact that you don't doesn't mean that you are not a good person. Therefore (19a) is false; it is not a necessary truth or even a truth that every good thing eliminates every evil it knows about and can eliminate.

We can see the same thing another way. You've been rock climbing. Still something of a novice, you've acquired a few cuts and bruises by inelegantly using your knees rather than your feet. One of these bruises is fairly painful. You mention it to a physician friend, who predicts the pain will leave of its own accord in a day or two. Meanwhile, he says, there's nothing he can do, short of amputating your leg above the knee, to remove the pain. Now the pain in your knee is an evil state of affairs. All else being equal, it would be better if you had no such pain. And it is within the power of your friend to eliminate this evil state of affairs. Does his failure to do so mean that he is not a good person? Of course not; for he could eliminate this evil state of affairs only by bringing about another, much worse evil. And so it is once again evident that (19a) is false. It is entirely possible that a good person fail to eliminate an evil state of affairs that he knows about and can eliminate. This would take place, if, as in the present example, he couldn't eliminate the evil without bringing about a *greater* evil.

A slightly different kind of case shows the same thing. A really impressive good state of affairs *G* will *outweigh* a trivial evil *E*—that is, the conjunctive state of affairs *G and E* is itself a good state of affairs. And surely a good person would not be obligated to eliminate a given evil if he could do so only by eliminating a good that outweighed it. Therefore (19a) is not necessarily true; it can't be used to show that set A is implicitly contradictory.

These difficulties might suggest another revision of (19); we might try

> **(19b) A good being eliminates every evil *E* that it knows about and that it can eliminate without either bringing about a greater evil or eliminating a good state of affairs that outweighs *E*.**

Is this necessarily true? It takes care of the second of the two difficulties afflicting (19a) but leaves the first untouched. We can see this as follows. First, suppose we say that a being *properly eliminates* an evil state of affairs if it eliminates that evil without either eliminating an outweighing good or bringing about a greater evil. It is then obviously possible that a person find himself in a situation where he could properly eliminate an evil *E* and could also properly eliminate another evil *E'*, but couldn't properly eliminate them *both*. You're rock climbing again, this time on the dreaded north face of the Grand Teton. You and your party come upon Curt and Bob, two mountaineers stranded 125 feet apart on the face. They untied to reach their cigarettes and then carelessly dropped the rope while lighting up. A violent, dangerous thunderstorm is approaching. You have time to rescue one of the stranded climbers and retreat before the storm hits; if you rescue both, however, you and your party and the two climbers will be caught on the face during the thunderstorm, which will very likely destroy your entire party. In this case you can eliminate one evil (Curt's being stranded on the face) without causing more evil or eliminating a greater good; and you are also able to properly eliminate the other evil (Bob's being thus stranded). But you can't properly eliminate them *both*. And so the fact that you don't rescue Curt, say, even though you could have, doesn't show that you aren't a good person. Here, then, each of the evils is such that you can properly eliminate it; but you can't properly eliminate them both, and hence can't be blamed for failing to eliminate one of them.

So neither (19a) nor (19b) is necessarily true. You may be tempted to reply that the sort of counterexamples offered—examples where someone is able to eliminate an evil *A* and also able to eliminate a different evil *B*, but unable to eliminate them both—are irrelevant to the case of a being who, like God, is both omnipotent and omniscient. That is, you may think that if an omnipotent and omniscient being is able to eliminate *each* of two evils, it follows that he can eliminate them *both*. Perhaps this is so; but it is not strictly to the point. The fact is the counterexamples show that (19a) and (19b) are not necessarily true and hence can't be used to show that set A is implicitly inconsistent. What the reply does suggest is that perhaps the atheologian will have more success if he works the properties of omniscience and omnipotence into (19). Perhaps he could say something like

> (19c) **An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate.**

And suppose, for purposes of argument, we concede the necessary truth of (19c). Will it serve Mackie's purposes? Not obviously. For we don't get a set that is formally contradictory by adding (20) and (19c) to set A. This set (call it A′) contains the following six members:

> (1) **God is omnipotent**
> (2) **God is wholly good**
> (2′) **God is omniscient**
> (3) **Evil exists**
> (19c) **An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate**

and

> (20) **There are no nonlogical limits to what an omnipotent being can do.**

Now if A′ were formally contradictory, then from any five of its members we could deduce the denial of the sixth by the laws of ordinary logic. That is, any five would *formally entail* the denial of the sixth. So if A′ were formally inconsistent, the denial of (3) would be formally entailed by the remaining five. That is, (1), (2), (2′), (19c), and (20) would formally entail

(3′) **There is no evil.**

But they don't; what they formally entail is not that there **is no evil** *at all* but only that

(3″) **There is no evil that God can properly eliminate.**

So (19c) doesn't really help either—not because it is not necessarily true but because its addition [with (20)] to set A does not yield a formally contradictory set.

Obviously, what the atheologian must add to get a formally contradictory set is

> (21) **If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs.**

Suppose we agree that the set consisting in A plus (19c), (20), and (21) is formally contradictory. So if (19c), (20), and (21) are all necessarily true, then set A is implicitly contradictory. We've already conceded that (19c) and (20) are indeed necessary. So we must take a look at (21). Is this proposition necessarily true?

No. To see this let us ask the following question. Under what conditions would an omnipotent being be unable to eliminate a certain evil *E* without eliminating an outweighing good? Well, suppose that *E* is *included in* some good state of affairs that outweighs it. That is, suppose there is some good state of affairs *G* so related to *E* that it is impossible that *G* obtain or be actual and *E* fail to obtain. (Another way to put this: a state of affairs *S* includes *S′* if the conjunctive state of affairs *S but not S′* is impossible, or if it is necessary that *S′* obtains if *S* does.) Now suppose that some good state of affairs *G* includes *an evil* state of affairs *E* that it outweighs. Then not even an omnipotent being could eliminate *E* without eliminating *G*. But *are* there any cases where a good state of affairs includes, in this sense, an evil that it outweighs?[7] Indeed there are such states of affairs. To take an artificial example, let's suppose that E is Paul's suffering from a minor abrasion and G is your being deliriously happy. The conjunctive state of affairs, *G and E*—the state of affairs that obtains if and only if both G and E obtain—is then a good state of affairs: it is better, all else being equal, that you be intensely happy and Paul suffer a mildly annoying abrasion than that this state of affairs not obtain. So *G and E* is a good state of affairs. And clearly *G and E* includes E: obviously it is necessarily true that if you are deliriously happy and Paul is suffering from an abrasion, then Paul is suffering from an abrasion.

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[7] More simply, the question is really just whether any good state of affairs includes an evil; a little reflection reveals that no good state of affairs can include an evil that it does *not* outweigh.

But perhaps you think this example trivial, tricky, slippery, and irrelevant. If so, take heart; other examples abound. Certain kinds of values, certain familiar kinds of good states of affairs, can't exist apart from evil of some sort. For example, there are people who display a sort of creative moral heroism in the face of suffering and adversity—a heroism that inspires others and creates a good situation out of a bad one. In a situation like this the evil, of course, remains evil; but the total state of affairs—someone's bearing pain magnificently, for example—may be good. If it is, then the good present must outweigh the evil; otherwise the total situation would not be *good.* But, of course, it is not possible that such a good state of affairs obtain unless some evil also obtain. It is a necessary truth that if someone bears pain magnificently, then someone is in pain.

The conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that (21) is not necessarily true. And our discussion thus far shows at the very least that it is no easy matter to find necessarily true propositions that yield a formally contradictory set when added to set A.[8] One wonders, therefore, why the many atheologians who confidently assert that this set is contradictory make no attempt whatever to *show* that it is. For the most part they are content just to *assert* that there is a contradiction here. Even Mackie, who sees that some "additional premises" or "quasi-logical rules" are needed, makes scarcely a beginning towards finding some additional premises that are necessarily true and that together with the members of set A formally entail an explicit contradiction.

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[8] In Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), chap. 5, I explore further the project of finding such propositions.

3. *Can We Show That There Is No Inconsistency Here?*

To summarize our conclusions so far: although many atheologians claim that the theist is involved in contradiction when he asserts the members of set A, this set, obviously, is neither *explicitly* nor *formally* contradictory; the claim, presumably, must be that it is *implicitly* contradictory. To make good this claim the atheologian must find some necessarily true proposition *p* (it could be a conjunction of several propositions) such that the addition of *p* to set A yields a set that is formally contradictory. No atheologian has produced even a plausible candidate for this role, and it certainly is not easy to see what such a proposition might be. Now we might think we should simply declare set A implicitly consistent on the principle that a proposition (or set) is to be presumed consistent or possible until proven otherwise. This course, however, leads to trouble. The same principle would impel us to declare the atheologian's claim—that set A is *in*consistent—possible or consistent. But the claim that a given set of propositions is implicitly contradictory, is itself either necessarily true or necessarily false; so if such a claim *is possible*, it is not necessarily false and is, therefore, true (in fact, necessarily true). If we followed the suggested principle, therefore, we should be obliged to declare set A implicitly consistent (since it hasn't been shown to be otherwise), but we should have to say the same thing about the atheologian's claim, since we haven't shown *that* claim to be inconsistent or impossible. The atheologian's claim, furthermore, is necessarily true if it is possible. Accordingly, if we accept the above principle, we shall have to declare set A both implicitly consistent and implicitly inconsistent. So all we can say at this point is that set A has not been shown to be implicitly inconsistent.

Can we go any further? One way to go on would be to try to *show* that set A is implicitly consistent or possible in the broadly logical sense. But what is involved in showing such a thing? Although there are various ways to approach this matter, they all resemble one another in an important respect. They all amount to this: to show that a set *S* is consistent you think of a *possible state of affairs* (it needn't *actually obtain*) which is such that if it were actual, then all of the members of *S* would be true. This procedure is sometimes called *giving a model of S*. For example, you might construct an axiom set and then show that it is consistent by giving a model of it; this is how it was shown that the denial of Euclid's parallel postulate is formally consistent with the rest of his postulates.

There are various special cases of this procedure to fit special circumstances. Suppose, for example, you have a pair of propositions p and q and wish to show them consistent. And suppose we say that a proposition p_1 *entails* a proposition p_2 if it is impossible that p_1 be true and p_2 false—if the conjunctive proposition p_1 *and not* p_2 is necessarily false. Then one way to show that p is consistent with q is to find some proposition r whose conjunction with p is both possible, in the broadly logical sense, and entails q. A rude and unlettered behaviorist, for example, might hold that thinking is really nothing but movements of the larynx; he might go on to hold that

> ***P*** **Jones did not move his larynx after April 30**

is inconsistent (in the broadly logical sense) with

> ***Q*** **Jones did some thinking during May.**

By way of rebuttal, we might point out that *P* appears to be consistent with

> ***R*** **While convalescing from an April 30 laryngotomy, Jones whiled away the idle hours by writing (in May) a splendid paper on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.**

So the conjunction of *P* and *R* appears to be consistent; but obviously it also entails *Q* (you can't write even a passable paper on Kant's *Critique* *of Pure Reason* without doing some thinking); so *P* and *Q* are consistent.

We can see that this is a special case of the procedure I mentioned above as follows. This proposition *R* is consistent with *P*; so the proposition *P and R* is possible, describes a possible state of affairs. But *P and R* entails *Q*; hence if *P and R* were true, *Q* would also be true, and hence both *P* and *Q* would be true. So this is really a case of producing a possible state of affairs such that, if it were actual, all the members of the set in question (in this case the pair set of *P* and *Q*) would be true.

How does this apply to the case before us? As follows. Let us conjoin propositions (1), (2), and (2′) and henceforth call the result (1):

> **(1) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good**

The problem, then, is to show that (1) and (3) (*evil* exists) are consistent. This could be done, as we've seen, by finding a proposition *r* that is consistent with (1) and such that (1) and (*r*) together entail (3). One proposition that might do the trick is

> **(22) God creates a world containing evil and has a good reason for doing so.**

If (22) is consistent with (1), then it follows that (1) and (3) (and hence set A) are consistent. Accordingly, one thing some theists have tried is to show that (22) and (1) are consistent.

One can attempt this in at least two ways. On the one hand, we could try to apply the same method again. Conceive of a possible state of affairs such that, if it obtained, an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God would have a good reason for permitting evil. On the other, *someone might* try to specify *what God's reason is* for permitting evil and try to show, if it is not obvious, that it is a good reason. St. Augustine, for example, one of the greatest and most influential philosopher-theologians of the Christian Church, writes as follows:

> . . . some people see with perfect truth that a creature is better if, while possessing free will, it remains always fixed upon God and never sins; then, reflecting on men's sins, they are grieved, not because they continue to sin, but because they were created. They say: He should have made us such that

> we never willed to sin, but always to enjoy the unchangeable truth.
>
> They should not lament or be angry. God has not compelled men to sin just because He created them and gave them the power to choose between sinning and not sinning. There are angels who have never sinned and never will sin.
>
> Such is the generosity of God's goodness that He has not refrained from creating even that creature which He foreknew would not only sin, but remain in the will to sin. As a runaway horse is better than a stone which does not run away because it lacks self-movement and sense perception, so the creature is more excellent which sins by free will than that which does not sin only because it has no free will.[9]

In broadest terms Augustine claims that God could create a better, more perfect universe by permitting evil than He could by refusing to do so:

> Neither the sins nor the misery are necessary to the perfection of the universe, but souls as such are necessary, which have the power to sin if they so will, and become miserable if they sin. If misery persisted after their sins had been abolished, or if there were misery before there were sins, then it might be right to say that the order and government of the universe were at fault. Again, if there were sins but no consequent misery, that order is equally dishonored by lack of equity.[10]

Augustine tries to tell us *what God's reason is* for permitting evil. At bottom, he says, it's that God can create a more perfect universe by permitting evil. A really top-notch universe requires the existence of free, rational, and moral agents; and some of the free creatures He created went wrong. But the universe with the free creatures it contains and the evil they commit is better than it would have been had it contained neither the free creatures nor this evil. Such an attempt to specify God's reason for permitting evil is what I earlier called a *theodicy;* in the words of John Milton it is an attempt to "justify the ways of God to man," to show that God is just in permitting evil. Augustine's kind of theodicy might be called a Free Will Theodicy, since the idea of rational creatures with free will plays such a prominent role in it.

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9. *The Problem of Free Choice,* Vol. 22 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1955), bk. 2, pp. 14–15.

10. Ibid., bk. 3, p. 9.

A theodicist, then, attempts to tell us why God permits evil. Quite distinct from a Free Will Theodicy is what I shall call a Free Will Defense. Here the aim is not to say what God's reason *is*, but at most what God's reason *might possibly be*. We could put the difference like this. The Free Will Theodicist and Free Will Defender are both trying to show that (1) is consistent with (22), and of course if so, then set A is consistent. The Free Will Theodicist tries to do this by finding some proposition *r* which in conjunction with (1) entails (22); he claims, furthermore, that this proposition is *true*, not just consistent with (1). He tries to tell us what God's reason for permitting evil *really is*. The Free Will Defender, on the other hand, though he also tries to find a proposition *r* that is consistent with (1) and in conjunction with it entails (22), does *not* claim to know or even believe that *r* is true. And here, of course, he is perfectly within his rights. His aim is to show that (1) is consistent with (22); all he need do then is find an *r* that is consistent with (1) and such that (1) and *(r)* entail (22); whether *r* is *true* is quite beside the point.

So there is a significant difference between a Free Will Theodicy and a Free Will Defense. The latter is sufficient (if successful) to show that set A is consistent; in a way a Free Will Theodicy goes beyond what is required. On the other hand, a theodicy would be much more satisfying, if possible to achieve. No doubt the theist would rather know what God's reason *is* for permitting evil than simply that it's possible that He has a good one. But in the present context (that of investigating the consistency of set A), the latter is all that's needed. Neither a defense or a theodicy, of course, gives any hint as to what God's reason for some *specific* evil—the death or suffering of someone close to you, for example—might be. And there is still another function—a sort of pastoral function[11]—in the neighborhood that neither serves. Confronted with evil in his own life or suddenly coming to realize more clearly than before the *extent* and *magnitude* of evil, a believer in God may undergo a crisis of faith. He may be tempted to follow the advice of Job's "friends"; he may be tempted to "curse God and die." Neither a Free Will Defense nor a Free Will Theodicy is designed to be of much help or comfort to one suffering from such a storm in the soul (although in a specific case, of course, one or the other could prove useful). Neither is to be thought of first of all as a means of pastoral counseling. Probably neither will enable someone to find peace with himself and with God in the face of the evil the world contains. But then, of course, neither is intended for that purpose.

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[11] I am indebted to Henry Schuurman (in conversation) for helpful discussion of the difference between this pastoral function and those served by a theodicy or a defense.

4. *The Free Will Defense*

In what follows I shall focus attention upon the Free Will Defense. I shall examine it more closely, state it more exactly, and consider objections to it; and I shall argue that in the end it is successful. Earlier we saw that among good states of affairs there are some that not even God can bring about without bringing about evil: those goods, namely, that *entail* or *include* evil states of affairs. The Free Will Defense can be looked upon as an effort to show that there may be a very different kind of good that God can't bring about without permitting evil. These are good states of affairs that don't include evil; they do not entail the existence of any evil whatever; nonetheless God Himself can't bring them about without permitting evil.

So how does the Free Will Defense work? And what does the Free Will Defender mean when he says that people are or may be free? What is relevant to the Free Will Defense is the idea of *being free with respect to an action.* 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. Freedom so conceived is not to be confused with unpredictability. You might be able to predict what you will do in a given situation even if you are free, in that situation, to do something else. If I know you well, I may be able to predict what action you will take in response to a certain set of conditions; it does not follow that you are not free with respect to that action. Secondly, I shall say that an action is *morally significant*, for a given person, if it would be wrong for him to perform the action but right to refrain or *vice versa.* Keeping a promise, for example, would ordinarily be morally significant for a person, as would refusing induction into the army. On the other hand, having Cheerios for breakfast (instead of Wheaties) would not normally be morally significant. Further, suppose we say that a person is *significantly free,* on a given occasion, if he is then free with respect to a morally significant action. And finally we must distinguish between *moral evil* and *natural evil.* The former is evil that results from free human activity; natural evil is any other kind of evil.[12]

Given these definitions and distinctions, we can make a preliminary statement of the Free Will Defense as follows. A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right *freely.* To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.

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[12] This distinction is not very precise (how, exactly, are we to construe "results from"?); but perhaps it will serve our present purposes.

I said earlier that the Free Will Defender tries to find a proposition that is consistent with

(1) **God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good**

and together with (1) entails that there is evil. According to the Free Will Defense, we must find this proposition somewhere in the above story. The heart of the Free Will Defense is the claim that it is *possible* that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contained moral evil. And if so, then it is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil.

Now this defense has met with several kinds of objections. For example, some philosophers say that *causal determinism* and *freedom*, contrary to what we might have thought, are not really incompatible.[13] But if so, then God could have created free creatures who were free, and free to do what is wrong, but nevertheless were causally determined to do only what is right. Thus He could have created creatures who were free to do what was wrong, while nevertheless preventing them from ever performing any wrong actions—simply by seeing to it that they were causally determined to do only what is right. Of course this contradicts the Free Will Defense, according to which there is inconsistency in supposing that God determines free creatures to do only what is right. But is it really possible that all of a person's actions are causally determined while some of them are free? How could that be so? According to one version of the doctrine in question, to say that George acts freely on a given occasion is to say only this: *if George had chosen to do otherwise, he would have done otherwise.* Now George's action *A* is causally determined if some event *E*—some event beyond his control—has already occurred, where the state of affairs consisting in *E*'s occurrence conjoined with George's *refraining* from performing *A*, is a causally impossible state of affairs. Then one can consistently hold both that all of a man's actions are causally determined and that some of them are free in the above sense. For suppose that all of a man's actions are causally determined and that he *couldn't*, on any occasion, have made any choice or performed any action different from the ones he did make and perform. It could still be true that if he *had* chosen to do otherwise, he would have done otherwise. Granted, he couldn't have chosen to do otherwise; but this is consistent with saying that *if* he had, things would have gone differently.

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[13] See, for example, A. Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, eds. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (London: SCM, 1955), pp. 150–153.

This objection to the Free Will Defense seems utterly implausible. One might as well claim that being in jail doesn't really limit one's freedom on the grounds that if one were *not* in jail, he'd be free to come and go as he pleased. So I shall say no more about this objection here.[14]

A second objection is more formidable. In essence it goes like this. Surely it is possible to do only what is right, even if one is free to do wrong. It is *possible*, in that broadly logical sense, that there be a world containing free creatures who always do what is right. There is certainly no *contradiction* or *inconsistency* in this idea. But God is omnipotent; his power has no nonlogical limitations. So if it's possible that there be a world containing creatures who are free to do what is wrong but never in fact do so, then it follows that an omnipotent God could create such a world. If so, however, the Free Will Defense must be mistaken in its insistence upon the possibility that God is omnipotent but unable to create a world containing moral good without permitting moral evil. J. L. Mackie (above, p. 12) states this objection:

> If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong; there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure

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[14] For further discussion of it see Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, pp. 132–135.

> to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.[15]

Now what, exactly, is Mackie's point here? This. According to the Free Will Defense, it is possible both that God is omnipotent and that He was unable to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil. But, replies Mackie, this limitation on His power to create is inconsistent with God's omnipotence. For surely it's *possible* that there be a world containing perfectly virtuous persons—persons who are significantly free but always do what is right. Surely there are *possible worlds* that contain moral good but no moral evil. But God, if He is omnipotent, can create any possible world He chooses. So it is *not* possible, contrary to the Free Will Defense, both that God is omnipotent and that He could create a world containing moral good only by creating one containing moral evil. If He is omnipotent, the only limitations of His power are *logical* limitations; in which case there are no possible worlds He could not have created.

This is a subtle and important point. According to the great German philosopher G.W. Leibniz, *this* world, the actual world, must be the best of all possible worlds. His reasoning goes as follows. Before God created anything at all, He was confronted with an enormous range of choices; He could create or bring into actuality any of the myriads of different possible worlds. Being perfectly good, He must have chosen to create the best world He could; being omnipotent, He was able to create any possible world He pleased. He must, therefore, have chosen the best of all possible worlds; and hence *this* world, the one He did create, must be the best possible. Now Mackie, of course, agrees with Leibniz that God, if omnipotent, could have created any world He pleased and would have created the best world he could. But while Leibniz draws the conclusion that this world, despite appearances, must be the best possible, Mackie concludes instead that there is no omnipotent, wholly good God. For, he says, it is obvious enough that this present world is not the best of all possible worlds.

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[15] Mackie, in *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 100–101.

The Free Will Defender disagrees with both Leibniz and Mackie. In the first place, he might say, what is the reason for supposing that *there is* such a thing as the best of all possible worlds? No matter how marvelous a world is—containing no matter how many persons enjoying unalloyed bliss—isn't it possible that there be an even better world containing even more persons enjoying even more unalloyed bliss? But what is really characteristic and central to the Free Will Defense is the claim that God, though omnipotent, could not have actualized just any possible world He pleased.

5. Was It within God's Power to Create Any Possible World He Pleased?

This is indeed the crucial question for the Free Will Defense. If we wish to discuss it with insight and authority, we shall have to look into the idea of *possible worlds*. And a sensible first question is this: what sort of thing is a possible world? The basic idea is that a possible world is a *way things could have been;* it is a *state of affairs* of some kind. Earlier we spoke of states of affairs, in particular of good and evil states of affairs. Suppose we look at this idea in more detail. What sort of thing is a state of affairs? The following would be examples:

> Nixon's having won the 1972 election
> 7 + 5's being equal to 12
> All men's being mortal

and

> Gary, Indiana's, having a really nasty pollution problem.

These are *actual* states of affairs: states of affairs that do in fact *obtain*. And corresponding to each such actual state of affairs there is a true proposition—in the above cases, the corresponding propositions would be *Nixon won the 1972 presidential election, 7 + 5 is equal to 12, all men are mortal,* and *Gary, Indiana, has a really nasty pollution problem.*

A proposition *p corresponds* to a state of affairs *s*, in this sense, if it is impossible that *p* be true and *s* fail to obtain and impossible that *s* obtain and *p* fail to be true.

But just as there are false propositions, so there are states of affairs that do *not* obtain or are *not* actual. *Kissinger's having swum the Atlantic* and *Hubert Horatio Humphrey's having run a mile in four minutes* would be examples. Some states of affairs that do not obtain are *impossible:* e.g., *Hubert's having drawn a square circle, 7 + 5's being equal to 75,* and *Agnew's having a brother who was an only child.* The propositions corresponding to these states of affairs, of course, are necessarily false. So there are states of affairs that *obtain* or *are actual* and also states of affairs that don't obtain. Among the latter some are *impossible* and others are possible. And a possible world is a possible state of affairs. Of course not every possible state of affairs is a possible world; *Hubert's having run a mile in four minutes* is a possible state of affairs but not a possible world. No doubt it is an *element* of many possible worlds, but it isn't itself inclusive enough to be one. To be a possible world, a state of affairs must be very large—so large as to be *complete* or *maximal.*

To get at this idea of completeness we need a couple of definitions. As we have already seen (above, p. 22) a state of affairs *A includes* a state of affairs *B* if it is not possible that *A* obtain and *B* not obtain or if the conjunctive state of affairs *A but not B*—the state of affairs that obtains if and only if *A* obtains and *B* does not—is not possible. For example, *Jim Whittaker's being the first American to climb Mt. Everest* includes *Jim Whittaker's being an American.* It also includes *Mt. Everest's being climbed, something's being climbed, no American's having climbed Everest before Whittaker did,* and the like. *Inclusion* among states of affairs is like *entailment* among propositions; and where a state of affairs *A* includes a state of affairs *B*, the proposition corresponding to *A* entails the one corresponding to *B*. Accordingly, *Jim Whittaker is the first American to climb Everest* entails *Mt. Everest has been climbed, something has been climbed,* and *no American climbed Everest before Whittaker did.* Now suppose we say further that a state of affairs *A precludes* a state of affairs *B* if it is not possible that *both* obtain, or if the conjunctive state of affairs *A and B* is impossible. Thus *Whittaker's being the first American to climb Mt. Everest* precludes *Luther Jerstad's being the first American to climb Everest*, as well as *Whittaker's never having climbed any mountains*. If *A* precludes *B*, then *A*'s corresponding proposition entails the denial of the one corresponding to *B*. Still further, let's say that the *complement* of a state of affairs is the state of affairs that obtains just in case *A* does not obtain. [Or we might say that the complement (call it $\bar{A}$) of *A* is the state of affairs corresponding to the *denial* or *negation* of the proposition corresponding to *A*.] Given these definitions, we can say what it is for a state of affairs to be *complete*: *A* is a complete state of affairs if and only if for every state of affairs *B*, either *A includes B or A precludes B*. (We could express the same thing by saying that if *A* is a complete state of affairs, then for every state of affairs *B*, either *A* includes *B* or *A* includes $\bar{B}$, the complement of *B*.) And now we are able to say what a possible world is: a possible world is any possible state of affairs that is complete. If *A* is a possible world, then it says something about everything; every state of affairs *S* is either included in or precluded by it.

Corresponding to each possible world *W*, furthermore, there is a set of propositions that I'll call *the book on W*. A proposition is in the book on *W* just in case the state of affairs to which it corresponds is included in *W*. Or we might express it like this. Suppose we say that a proposition *P* is *true in a world W* if and only if *P would have been true if W had been actual*—if and only if, that is, it is not possible that *W* be actual and *P* be false. Then the book on *W* is the set of propositions true in *W*. Like possible worlds, books are *complete*; if *B* is a book, then for any proposition *P*, either *P* or the denial of *P* will be a member of *B*. A book is a *maximal consistent set* of propositions; it is so large that the addition of another proposition to it always yields an explicitly inconsistent set.

Of course, for each possible world there is exactly one book corresponding to it (that is, for a given world *W* there is just one book *B* such that each member of *B* is true in *W*); and for each book there is just one world to which it corresponds. So every world has its book.

It should be obvious that exactly one possible world is actual. At *least* one must be, since the set of true propositions is a maximal consistent set and hence a book. But then it corresponds to a possible world, and the possible world corresponding to this set of propositions (since it's the set of *true* propositions) will be actual. On the other hand there is at *most* one actual world. For suppose there were two: W and W'. These worlds cannot include all the very same states of affairs; if they did, they would be the very same world. So there must be at least one state of affairs S such that W includes S and W' does not. But a possible world is maximal; W', therefore, includes the complement S of S. So if both W and W' were actual, as we have supposed, then both S and $\bar{S}$ would be actual—which is impossible. So there can't be more than one possible world that is actual.

Leibniz pointed out that a proposition p is necessary if it is true in every possible world. We may add that p is possible if it is true in one world and impossible if true in none. Furthermore, p *entails* q if there is no possible world in which p is true and q is false; and p *is consistent with* q if there is at least one world in which both p and q are true.

A further feature of possible worlds is that people (and other things) *exist* in them. Each of us exists in the actual world, obviously; but a person also exists in many worlds distinct from the actual world. It would be a mistake, of course, to think of all of these worlds as somehow "going on" at the same time, with the same person reduplicated through these worlds and actually existing in a lot of different ways. This is not what is meant by saying that the same person exists in different possible worlds. What is meant, instead, is this: a person Paul exists in each of those possible worlds W which is such that, if W *had been actual*, Paul would have existed—actually existed. Suppose Paul had been an inch taller than he is, or a better tennis player. Then the world that does in fact obtain would not have been actual; some other world—W', let's say—would have obtained instead. If W' had been actual, Paul would have existed; so Paul exists in W'. (Of course there are still other possible worlds in which Paul does not exist—worlds, for example, in which there are no people at all.) Accordingly, when we say that Paul exists in a world

W, what we mean is that Paul *would have* existed had *W* been actual. Or we could put it like this: Paul exists in each world *W* that includes the state of affairs consisting in Paul's existence. We can put this still more simply by saying that Paul exists in those worlds whose books contain the proposition *Paul exists.*

But isn't there a problem here? *Many* people are named "Paul": Paul the apostle, Paul J. Zwier, John Paul Jones, and many other famous Pauls. So who goes with "Paul exists"? Which Paul? The answer has to do with the fact that books contain *propositions*—not sentences. They contain the sort of thing sentences are used to express and assert. And the same sentence—"Aristotle is wise," for example—can be used to express many different propositions. When Plato used it, he asserted a proposition predicating wisdom of his famous pupil; when Jackie Onassis uses it, she asserts a proposition predicating wisdom of her wealthy husband. These are distinct propositions (we might even think they differ in truth value); but they are expressed by the same sentence. Normally (but not always) we don't have much trouble determining which of the several propositions expressed by a given sentence is relevant in the context at hand. So in this case a given person, Paul, exists in a world *W* if and only if *W*'s book contains the proposition that says that *he*—that particular person—exists. The fact that the sentence we use to express this proposition can also be used to express *other* propositions is not relevant.

After this excursion into the nature of books and worlds we can return to our question. Could God have created just any world He chose? Before addressing the question, however, we must note that God does not, strictly speaking, *create* any possible worlds or states of affairs at all. What He creates are the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. But He has not created states of affairs. There are, for example, the state of affairs consisting in God's existence and the state of affairs consisting in His nonexistence. That is, there is such a thing as the state of affairs consisting in the existence of God, and there is also such a thing as the state of affairs consisting in the nonexistence of God, just as there are the two propositions *God exists* and *God does not exist.* The theist believes that the first state of affairs is actual and the first proposition true; the atheist believes that the second state of affairs is actual and the second proposition true. But, of course, both propositions *exist*, even though just one is true. Similarly, there are two states of affairs here, just one of which is actual. So both states of affairs *exist*, but only one *obtains*. And God has not created either one of them since there never was a time at which either did not exist. Nor has He created the state of affairs consisting in the earth's existence; there was a time when *the earth* did not exist, but none when the state of affairs consisting in the earth's existence didn't exist. Indeed, God did not bring into existence any states of affairs at all. What He did was to perform actions of a certain sort—creating the heavens and the earth, for example—which resulted in the *actuality* of certain states of affairs. God *actualizes* states of affairs. He actualizes the possible world that does in fact obtain; He does not create it. And while He has created Socrates, He did not create the state of affairs consisting in Socrates' existence.[16]

Bearing this in mind, let's finally return to our question. Is the atheologian right in holding that if God is omnipotent, then he could have actualized or created any possible world He pleased? Not obviously. First, we must ask ourselves whether God is a *necessary* or a *contingent* being. A *necessary* being is one that exists in every possible world—one that would have existed no matter which possible world had been actual; a contingent being exists only in some possible worlds. Now if God is not a necessary being (and many, perhaps most, theists think that He is not), then clearly enough there will be many possible worlds He could not have actualized—all those, for example, in which He does not exist. Clearly, God could not have created a world in which He doesn't even exist.

So, if God is a contingent being then there are many possible worlds beyond His power to create. But this is really irrelevant to our present concerns. For perhaps the atheologian can maintain his case if he revises his claim to avoid this difficulty; perhaps he will say something like this: if God is omnipotent, then He could have actualized any of those possible worlds *in which He exists.* So if He exists and is omnipotent, He could have actualized (contrary to the Free Will Defense) any of those possible worlds in which He exists and in which there exist free creatures who do no wrong. He could have actualized worlds containing moral good but no moral evil. Is this correct?

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[16] Strict accuracy demands, therefore, that we speak of God as *actualizing* rather than creating possible worlds. I shall continue to use both locutions, thus sacrificing accuracy to familiarity. For more about possible worlds see my book *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), chaps. 4–8

Let's begin with a trivial example. You and Paul have just returned from an Australian hunting expedition: your quarry was the elusive double-wattled cassowary. Paul captured an aardvark, mistaking it for a cassowary. The creature's disarming ways have won it a place in Paul's heart; he is deeply attached to it. Upon your return to the States you offer Paul $500 for his aardvark, only to be rudely turned down. Later you ask yourself, "What would he have done if I'd offered him $700?" Now what is it, exactly, that you are asking? What you're really asking in a way is whether, under a *specific set of conditions,* Paul would have sold it. These conditions include your having offered him $700 rather than $500 for the aardvark, everything else being as much as possible like the conditions that did in fact obtain. Let S′ be this set of conditions or state of affairs. S′ includes the state of affairs consisting in your offering Paul $700 (instead of the $500 you did offer him); of course it does not include his *accepting* your offer, and it does not include his *rejecting* it; for the rest, the conditions it includes are just like the ones that did obtain in the actual world. So, for example, S′ includes Paul's being free to accept the offer and free to refrain; and if in fact the going rate for an aardvark was $650, then S′ includes the state of affairs consisting in the going rate's being $650. So we might put your question by asking which of the following conditionals is true:

> **(23) If the state of affairs S′ had obtained, Paul would have accepted the offer**

(24) If the state of affairs *S'* had obtained, Paul would not have accepted the offer.

It seems clear that at least one of these conditionals is true, but naturally they can't both be; so exactly one is.

Now since *S'* includes neither Paul's accepting the offer nor his rejecting it, the antecedent of (23) and (24) does not entail the consequent of either. That is,

(25) *S'* obtains

does not entail either

(26) Paul accepts the offer

or

(27) Paul does not accept the offer.

So there are possible worlds in which both (25) and (26) are true, and other possible worlds in which both (25) and (27) are true.

We are now in a position to grasp an important fact. Either (23) or (24) is in fact true; and either way there are possible worlds God could not have actualized. Suppose, first of all, that (23) is true. Then it was beyond the power of God to create a world in which (1) Paul is free to sell his aardvark and free to refrain, and in which the other states of affairs included in *S'* obtain, and (2) Paul does not sell. That is, it was beyond His power to create a world in which (25) and (27) are both true. There is at least one possible world like this, but God, despite His omnipotence, could not have brought about its actuality. For let *W* be such a world. To actualize *W*, God must bring it about that Paul is free with respect to this action, and that the other states of affairs included in *S'* obtain. But (23), as we are supposing, is true; so if God had actualized *S'* and left Paul *free* with respect to this action, he would have sold: in which case *W* would not have been actual. If, on the other hand, God had *brought it about* that Paul didn't sell or had *caused him* to refrain from selling, then Paul would not have been free with respect to this action; then *S'* would not have been actual (since *S'* includes

Paul's being free with respect to it), and *W* would *not* have been actual since *W* includes *S′*.

Of course if it is (24) rather than (23) that is true, then another class of worlds was beyond God's power to actualize—those, namely, in which *S′* obtains and Paul *sells* his aardvark. These are the worlds in which both (25) and (26) are true. But either (23) or (24) is true. Therefore, there are possible worlds God could not have actualized. If we consider whether or not God could have created a world in which, let's say, both (25) and (26) are true, we see that the answer depends upon a peculiar kind of fact; it depends upon what Paul would have freely chosen to do in a certain situation. So there are any number of possible worlds such that it is partly up to Paul whether God can create them.[17]

That was a past tense example. Perhaps it would be useful to consider a future tense case, since this might seem to correspond more closely to God's situation in choosing a possible world to actualize. At some time *t* in the near future Maurice will be free with respect to some insignificant action—having freeze-dried oatmeal for breakfast, let's say. That is, at time *t* Maurice will be free to have oatmeal but also free to take something else—shredded wheat, perhaps. Next, suppose we consider *S′*, a state of affairs that is included in the actual world and includes Maurice's being free with respect to taking oatmeal at time *t*. That is, *S′* includes Maurice's being free at time *t* to take oatmeal and free to reject it. *S′* does not include Maurice's taking oatmeal, however; nor does it include his rejecting it. For the rest *S′* is as much as possible like the actual world. In particular there are many conditions that do in fact hold at time *t* and are *relevant* to his choice—such conditions, for example, as the fact that he hasn't had oatmeal lately, that his wife will be annoyed if he rejects it, and the like; and *S′* includes each of these conditions. Now God no doubt knows what Maurice will do at time *t*, if *S* obtains; He knows which action Maurice would freely perform if S were to be actual. That is, God knows that one of the following conditionals is true:

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[17] For a fuller statement of this argument see Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, chap. 9, secs. 4–6.

(28) **If *S′* were to obtain, Maurice will freely take the oatmeal**

or

(29) **If *S′* were to obtain, Maurice will freely reject it.**

We may not know which of these is true, and Maurice himself may not know; but presumably God does.

So either God knows that (28) is true, or else He knows that (29) is. Let's suppose it is (28). Then there is a possible world that God, though omnipotent, cannot create. For consider a possible world *W′* that shares *S′* with the actual world (which for ease of reference I'll name "Kronos") and in which Maurice does *not* take oatmeal. (We know there *is* such a world, since *S′* does not include Maurice's taking the oatmeal.) *S′* obtains in *W′* just as it does in Kronos. Indeed, everything in *W′* is just as it is in Kronos up to time *t*. But whereas in Kronos Maurice takes oatmeal at time *t*, in *W′* he does not. Now *W′* is a perfectly possible world; but it is not within God's power to create it or bring about its actuality. For to do so He must actualize *S′*. But (28) is in fact true. So if God actualizes *S′* (as He must to create *W′*) and leaves Maurice free with respect to the action in question, then he will take the oatmeal; and then, of course, *W′* will not be actual. If, on the other hand, God causes Maurice to *refrain* from taking the oatmeal, then he is not *free* to take it. That means, once again, that *W′* is not actual; for in *W′* Maurice is free to take the oatmeal (even if he doesn't do so). So if (28) is true, then this world *W′* is one that God can't actualize; it is not within His power to actualize it even though He is omnipotent and it is a possible world.

Of course, if it is (29) that is true, we get a similar result; then too there are possible worlds that God can't actualize. These would be worlds which share *S′* with Kronos and in which Maurice *does* take oatmeal. But either (28) or (29) *is* true; so either way there is a possible world that God can't create. If we consider a world in which *S'* obtains and in which Maurice freely chooses oatmeal at time *t*, we see that whether or not it is within God's power to actualize it depends upon what Maurice would do if he were free in a certain situation. Accordingly, there are any number of possible worlds such that it is partly up to Maurice whether or not God can actualize them. It is, of course, up to God whether or not to create Maurice and also up to God whether or not to make him free with respect to the action of taking oatmeal at time *t*. (God could, if He chose, cause him to succumb to the dreaded *equine obsession*, a condition shared by some people and most horses, whose victims find it *psychologically impossible* to refuse oats or oat products.) But if He creates Maurice and creates him free with respect to this action, then whether or not he actually performs the action is up to Maurice—not God.[18]

Now we can return to the Free Will Defense and the problem of evil. The Free Will Defender, you recall, insists on the possibility that it is not within God's power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil. His atheological opponent—Mackie, for example—agrees with Leibniz in insisting that *if* (as the theist holds) God is omnipotent, then it *follows* that He could have created any possible world He pleased. We now see that this contention—call it "Leibniz' Lapse"—is a mistake. The atheologian is right in holding that there are many possible worlds containing moral good but no moral evil; his mistake lies in endorsing Leibniz' Lapse. So one of his premises—that God, if omnipotent, could have actualized just any world He pleased—is false.

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[18] For a more complete and more exact statement of this argument see Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, chap. 9, secs. 4–6.

6. *Could God Have Created a World Containing Moral Good but No Moral Evil?*

Now suppose we recapitulate the logic of the situation. The Free Will Defender claims that the following is possible:

> (30) **God is omnipotent, and it was not within His power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.**

By way of retort the atheologian insists that there are possible worlds containing moral good but no moral evil. He adds that an omnipotent being could have actualized any possible world he chose. So if God is omnipotent, it follows that He could have actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil; hence (30), contrary to the Free Will Defender's claim, is not possible. What we have seen so far is that his second premiss—Leibniz' Lapse—is false.

Of course, this does not settle the issue in the Free Will Defender's favor. Leibniz' Lapse (appropriately enough for a lapse) is false; but this doesn't show that (30) is possible. To show this latter we must demonstrate the possibility that among the worlds God could not have actualized are all the worlds containing moral good but no moral evil. How can we approach this question?

Instead of choosing oatmeal for breakfast or selling an aardvark, suppose we think about a morally significant action such as taking a bribe. Curley Smith, the mayor of Boston, is opposed to the proposed freeway route; it would require destruction of the Old North Church along with some other antiquated and structurally unsound buildings. L. B. Smedes, the director of highways, asks him whether he'd drop his opposition for $1 million. "Of course," he replies. "Would you do it for $2?" asks Smedes. "What do you take me for?" comes the indignant reply. "That's already established," smirks Smedes; "all that remains is to nail down your price." Smedes then offers him a bribe of $35,000; unwilling to break with the fine old traditions of Bay State politics, Curley accepts. Smedes then spends a sleepless night wondering whether he could have bought Curley for $20,000.

Now suppose we assume that Curley was free with respect to the action of taking the bribe—free to take it and free to refuse. And suppose, furthermore, that he would have taken it. That is, let us suppose that

> **(31) If Smedes had offered Curley a bribe of $20,000, he would have accepted it.**

If (31) is true, then there is a state of affairs S' that (1) includes Curley's being offered a bribe of $20,000; (2) does not include either his accepting the bribe or his rejecting it; and (3) is otherwise as much as possible like the actual world. Just to make sure S' includes every relevant circumstance, let us suppose that it is a *maximal world segment.* That is, add to S' any state of affairs compatible with but not included in it, and the result will be an entire possible world. We could think of it roughly like this: S' is included in at least one world W in which Curley takes the bribe and in at least one world W' in which he rejects it. If S' is a maximal world segment, then S' is what remains of W when *Curley's taking the bribe* is deleted; it is also what remains of W' when *Curley's rejecting the bribe* is deleted. More exactly, if S' is a maximal world segment, then every possible state of affairs that includes S', but isn't included by S', is a possible world. So if (31) is true, then there is a maximal world segment S' that (1) includes Curley's being offered a bribe of $20,000; (2) does not include either his accepting the bribe or his rejecting it; (3) is otherwise as much as possible like the actual world—in particular, it includes Curley's being free with respect to the bribe; and (4) is such that if it were actual then Curley would have taken the bribe. That is,

> **(32) If S' were actual, Curley would have accepted the bribe**

is true.

Now, of course, there is at least one possible world W' in which S' is actual and Curley does not take the bribe. But God could not have created *W′*; to do so, He would have been obliged to actualize *S′*, leaving Curley free with respect to the action of taking the bribe. But under these conditions Curley, as (32) assures us, would have accepted the bribe, so that the world thus created would not have been *S′*.

Curley, as we see, is not above a bit of Watergating. But there may be worse to come. Of course, there are possible worlds in which he is significantly free (i.e., free with respect to a morally significant action) and never does what is wrong. But the sad truth about Curley may be this. Consider *W′*, any of these worlds: in *W′* Curley is significantly free, so in *W′* there are some actions that are morally significant for him and with respect to which he is free. But at least one of these actions —call it *A*—has the following peculiar property. There is a maximal world segment *S′* that obtains in *W′* and is such that (1) *S′* includes Curley's being free *re A* but neither his performing *A* nor his refraining from *A*; (2) *S′* is otherwise as much as possible like *W′*; and (3) if *S′* had been actual, Curley would have gone wrong with respect to *A*.[19] (Notice that this third condition holds in fact, in the actual world; it does not hold in that world *W′*.)

This means, of course, that God could not have actualized *W′*. For to do so He'd have been obliged to bring it about that *S′* is actual; but then Curley would go wrong with respect to *A*. Since in *W′* he always does what is right, the world thus actualized would not be *W′*. On the other hand, if God *causes* Curley to go right with respect to *A* or *brings it about that* he does so, then Curley isn't free with respect to *A*; and so once more it isn't *W′* that is actual. Accordingly God cannot create *W′*. But *W′* was just any of the worlds in which Curley is significantly free but always does only what is right. It therefore follows that it was not within God's power to create a world in which Curley produces moral good but no moral evil. Every world God can actualize is such that if Curley is significantly free in it, he takes at least one wrong action.

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[19] A person goes wrong with respect to an action if he either wrongfully performs it or wrongfully fails to perform it.

Obviously Curley is in serious trouble. I shall call the malady from which he suffers *transworld depravity*. (I leave as homework the problem of comparing transworld depravity with what Calvinists call "total depravity.") By way of explicit definition:

> **(33) A person *P suffers from transworld depravity* if and only if the following holds: for every world *W* such that *P* is significantly free in *W* and *P* does only what is right in *W*, there is an action *A* and a maximal world segment *S'* such that**
> **(1) *S'* includes *A*'s being morally significant for *P***
> **(2) *S'* includes *P*'s being free with respect to *A***
> **(3) *S'* is included in *W* and includes neither *P*'s performing *A* nor *P*'s refraining from performing *A***

and

> **(4) If *S'* were actual, *P* would go wrong with respect to *A*.**

(In thinking about this definition, remember that (4) is to be true in fact, in the actual world—not in that world *W*.)

What is important about the idea of transworld depravity is that if a person suffers from it, then it wasn't within God's power to actualize any world in which that person is significantly free but does no wrong—that is, a world in which he produces moral good but no moral evil.

We have been considering a crucial contention of the Free Will Defender: the contention, namely, that

> **(30) God is omnipotent, and it was not within His power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.**

How is transworld depravity relevant to this? As follows. Obviously it is possible that there be persons who suffer from transworld depravity. More generally, it is possible that *everybody* suffers from it. And if this possibility were actual, then God, though omnipotent, could not have created any of the possible worlds containing just the persons who do in fact exist, and containing moral good but no moral evil. For to do so He'd have to create persons who were significantly free (otherwise there would be no moral good) but suffered from transworld depravity. Such persons go wrong with respect to at least one action in any world God could have actualized and in which they are free with respect to morally significant actions; so the price for creating a world in which they produce moral good is creating one in which they also produce moral evil.

7. *Transworld Depravity and Essence*

Now we might think this settles the question in favor of the Free Will Defender. But the fact is it doesn't. For suppose all the people that exist in Kronos, the actual world, suffer from transworld depravity; it doesn't follow that God could not have created a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil. God could have created *other people.* Instead of creating us, i.e., the people that exist in Kronos, He could have created a world containing people, but not containing any of us—or perhaps a world containing some of us along with some others who do not exist in Kronos. And perhaps if He'd done that, He could have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

Perhaps. But then again, perhaps not. Suppose we look into the matter a little further. Let *W* be a world distinct from Kronos that contains a significantly free person *x* who does not exist in Kronos. Let us suppose that this person *x* does only what is right. I can see no reason to doubt that there *are* such worlds; but what reason do we have for supposing that God could have created any of them? How do we know that He can? To investigate this question, we must look into the idea of an *individual nature* or *essence.* I said earlier (p. 37) that the same individual—Socrates, for example—exists in many different possible worlds. In some of these he has properties quite different from those he has in Kronos, the actual world. But some of his properties are ones he has in *every* world in which he exists; these are his *essential* properties.[20] Among them would be some that are *trivially* essential—such properties as *being unmarried if a bachelor, being either six feet tall or else not six feet tall, being self-identical,* and the like. Another and more interesting kind of essential property can be explained as follows. Socrates has the property of being snubnosed. This property, presumably, is not essential to him; he could have had some other kind of nose. So there are possible worlds in which he is not snubnosed. Let *W'* be any such world. If *W'* had been actual, Socrates would not have been snubnosed; that is to say, Socrates has the property *being nonsnubnosed in W'*. For to say that an object *x* has a property of this sort—the property of having *P* in *W*, where *P* is a property and *W* is a possible world—is to say simply that *x would have had P if W had been actual.* Properties of this sort are *world-indexed* properties.[21] Socrates has the world-indexed property *being nonsnubnosed in W'.* He has this property in Kronos, the actual world. On the other hand, in *W'* Socrates has the property *being snubnosed in Kronos.* For suppose *W'* had been actual: then, while Socrates would not have been snubnosed, it would have been true that if *Kronos* had been actual, Socrates would have been snubnosed.

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[20] For a discussion of essential properties see Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity,* chaps. 2–4.

It is evident, I take it, that if indeed Socrates *is* snubnosed in Kronos, the actual world, then it is true in every world that Socrates is *snubnosed in Kronos.*[22] So he has the property *being snubnosed in Kronos* in every world in which he exists. This property, therefore, is essential to him; there is no world in which he exists and lacks it. Indeed, it is easy to see, I think, that every world-indexed property he has will be essential to him; and every world-indexed property he *lacks* will be such that its complement is essential to him.

But how many world-indexed properties does he have? Quite a few. We should note that for any world *W* and property *P*, there is the world-indexed property *has P in W;* and for any such world-indexed property, either Socrates has it or he has its complement—the property of *not* having P in W. For any world W and property P, either Socrates would have had P, had W been actual, or it's false that Socrates would have had P under that condition. So each world-indexed property P is such that either Socrates has P essentially, or else its complement $\bar{P}$ is essential to him.

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[21] For more about world-indexed properties see Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity,* chap. 4, sec. 11.

[22] For argument see Alvin Plantinga, "World and Essence," *Philosophical Review* 79 (October 1970): 487 and *The Nature of Necessity,* chap 4, sec. 11.

Now suppose we define Socrates' *essence* as the set of properties essential to him. His essence is a set of properties, each of which is essential to him; and this set contains all his world-indexed properties, together with some others. But furthermore, it is evident, I think, that no *other* person has all of these properties in this set. Another person might have *some* of the same world-indexed properties as Socrates: he might be *snubnosed in Kronos* for example. But he couldn't have *all* of Socrates' world-indexed properties for then he would just *be* Socrates. So there is no person who shares Socrates' essence with him. But we can say something even stronger: there *couldn't* be any such person. For such a person would just be Socrates and hence not *another* person. The essence of Socrates, therefore, is a set of properties each of which he has essentially. Furthermore, there neither is nor could be another person distinct from Socrates that has all of the properties in this set. And finally, Socrates' essence contains a *complete* set of world-indexed properties—that is, if P is world-indexed, then either P is a member of Socrates' essence or else $\bar{P}$ is.[23]

Returning to Curley, we recall that he suffers from transworld depravity. This fact implies something interesting about Curleyhood, Curley's essence. Take those worlds W such that *is significantly free in W and never does what is wrong in W* are contained in Curley's essence. Each of these worlds has an important property if Curley suffers from transworld depravity; each is such that God could not have created or actualized it. We can see this as follows. Suppose W' is some world such that Curley's essence contains the property *is significantly free in W′ but never does what is wrong in W′*. That is, W' is a world in which Curley is significantly free but always does what is right. But, of course, Curley

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[23] For more discussion of essences see Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity,* chap. 5.

suffers from transworld depravity. This means that there is an action *A* and a maximal world segment *S′* such that

(1) *S′* includes *A*'s being morally significant for Curley
(2) *S′* includes Curley's being free with respect to *A*
(3) *S′* is included in *W′* but includes neither Curley's performing *A* nor his refraining from *A*

and

(4) If *S′* had been actual, Curley would have gone wrong with respect to *A*.

But then (by the argument of p. 47) God could not have created or instantiated *W′*. For to do so he would have had to bring it about that *S′* obtain; and then Curley would have gone wrong with respect to *A*. Since in *W′* he always does what is right, *W′* would not have been actual. So if Curley suffers from transworld depravity, then Curley's essence has this property: God could not have created any world *W* such that Curleyhood contains the properties *is significantly free in W* and *always does what is right in W*.

We can use this connection between Curley's transworld depravity and his essence as the basis for a definition of transworld depravity as applied to essences rather than persons. We should note first that if *E* is a person's essence, then that person is the *instantiation* of *E*; he is the thing that has (or exemplifies) every property in *E*. To instantiate an essence, God creates a person who has that essence; and in creating a person He instantiates an essence. Now we can say that

(34) An essence *E suffers from transworld depravity* if and only if for every world *W* such that *E contains* the properties *is significantly free in W* and *always does what is right in W*, there is an action *A* and a maximal world segment *S′* such that
(1) *S′* includes *E's being instantiated* and *E's instantiation's being free with respect to A* and *A's being morally significant for E's instantiation*,

(2) S' is included in W but includes neither *E's instantiation's performing A* nor *E's instantiation's refraining from A*

and

(3) if S' were actual, then the instantiation of E would have gone wrong with respect to A.

By now it is evident, I take it, that if an essence E suffers from transworld depravity, then it was not within God's power to actualize a possible world W such that E contains the properties *is significantly free in W* and *always does what is right in W*. Hence it was not within God's power to create a world in which E is instantiated and in which its instantiation is significantly free but always does what is right.

And the interesting fact here is this: it is possible that every creaturely essence—every essence including the property of being created by God—suffers from transworld depravity. But now suppose this is true. Now God can create a world containing moral good only by creating significantly free persons. And, since every person is the instantiation of an essence, He can create significantly free persons only by instantiating some essences. But if every essence suffers from transworld depravity, then no matter which essences God instantiates, the resulting persons, if free with respect to morally significant actions, would always perform at least some wrong actions. If every essence suffers from transworld depravity, then it was beyond the power of God Himself to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil. He might have been able to create worlds in which moral evil is very considerably outweighed by moral good; but it was not within His power to create worlds containing moral good but no moral evil—and this despite the fact that He is omnipotent. Under these conditions God could have created a world containing no moral evil only by creating one without significantly free persons. But it is possible that every essence suffers from transworld depravity; so it's possible that God could not have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

8. *The Free Will Defense Vindicated*

Put formally, you remember, the Free Will Defender's project was to show that

> (1) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good

is consistent with

> (3) There is evil.

What we have just seen is that

> (35) It was not within God's power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil

is possible and consistent with God's omnipotence and omniscience. But then it is clearly consistent with (1). So we can use it to show that (1) is consistent with (3). For consider

> (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good
> (35) It was not within God's power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil

and

> (36) God created a world containing moral good.

These propositions are evidently consistent—i.e., their conjunction is a possible proposition. But taken together they entail

> (3) There is evil.

For (36) says that God created a world containing moral good; this together with (35) entails that He created one containing moral evil. But if it contains moral evil, then it contains evil. So (1), (35), and (36) are jointly consistent and entail (3); hence (1) is consistent with (3); hence set A is consistent. Remember. to serve in this argument (35) and (36) need not be known to be true, or likely on our evidence, or anything of the sort; they need only be consistent with (1). Since they are, there is no contradiction in set A; so the Free Will Defense appears to be successful.

9. Is God's Existence Compatible with the Amount of Moral Evil the World Contains?

The world, after all, contains a *great deal* of moral evil; and what we've seen so far is only that God's existence is compatible with *some* moral evil. Perhaps the atheologian can regroup; perhaps he can argue that at any rate God's existence is not consistent with the vast *amount* and *variety* of moral evil the universe actually contains. Of course, there doesn't seem to be any way to measure moral evil—that is, we don't have units like volts or pounds or kilowatts so that we could say "this situation contains exactly 35 turps of moral evil." Still, we can compare situations in terms of evil, and we can often see that one state of affairs contains more moral evil than another. Now perhaps the atheologian could maintain that at any rate God could have created a world containing *less* moral evil than the actual world contains.

But is this really obvious? It is obvious, but, considered by itself it is also irrelevant. God could have created a world with *no* moral evil just by creating no significantly free creatures. A more relevant question is this: was it within God's power to create a world that contained a better mixture of moral good and evil than Kronos—one, let's say, that contained as much moral good but less moral evil? And here the answer is not obvious at all. Possibly this was *not* within God's power, which is all the Free Will Defender needs. We can see this as follows. Of course, there are many possible worlds containing as much moral good as Kronos, but less moral evil. Let W' be any such world. If W' had been actual, there would have been as much moral good (past, present, and future) as in fact there was, is, and will be; and there would have been less moral evil in all. Now in W' a certain set S of essences is instantiated (that is, there is a set S of essences such that if W' had been actual, then each member of S would have been instantiated). So to create W′ God would have had to create persons who were the instantiations of these essences. The following, however, is possible. There is an action *A*, a maximal world segment *S′* and a member *E* of *S* such that

> (a) *E* contains the properties: *is significantly free with respect to A* in W′ and *goes right with respect to A* in *W′*
> (b) *S′* is included in *W′* and includes *E's being instantiated,* but includes neither *E's instantiation's performing A* nor *E's instantiation's refraining from A*

and

> (c) if *S′* had been actual, *E*'s instantiation would have gone wrong with respect to *A*.

If this possibility is actual, then God could not have actualized *W′*. For to do so He'd have had to instantiate *E*, cause *E*'s instantiation to be free with respect to *A*, and bring it about that S′ was actual. But then the instantiation of *E* would have gone wrong with respect to *A*, so that the world thus created would not have been *W′*; for in *W′* *E*'s instantiation goes *right* with respect to *A*.

More generally, it's possible that every world containing as much moral good as the actual world, but less moral evil, resembles *W′* in that God could not have created it. For it is possible that

> (37) For every world *W* containing as much moral good as Kronos, but less moral evil, there is at least one essence *E*, an action *A*, and a maximal world segment *S′* such that
> (1) *E* contains the properties: *is free with respect to A* in *W* and *goes right with respect to A* in *W*
> (2) *S′* is included in *W* and includes *E*'s being instantiated but includes neither *E's instantiation's performing A* nor *E's instantiation's refraining from A*

and

> (3) if *S′* were actual, *E*'s instantiation would have gone wrong with respect to *A*.

(37) is possible; if it is *true,* then it wasn't within the power of God to create a world containing as much moral good as this one but less moral evil. So it's possible that this was not within God's power; but if so, then (1) is compatible with the proposition that there is as much moral evil as Kronos does in fact contain. And, of course, what the Free Will Defender claims is not that (37) is *true;* he claims only that it is compatible with the existence of a wholly good, omnipotent God.

The Free Will Defense, then successfully shows that set *A* is consistent. It can also be used to show that

> **(1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect**

is consistent with

> **(38) There is as much moral evil as Kronos contains.**

For clearly enough (1), (37), and

> **(39) God has created a world containing as much moral good as Kronos contains**

are jointly consistent. But (37) tells us that God could not have created a world containing more moral good but less moral evil than Kronos; so these three propositions entail (38). It follows that (1) and (38) are consistent.

10. Is God's Existence Compatible with Natural *Evil?*

Perhaps the atheologian can regroup once more. What about *natural* evil? Evil that can't be ascribed to the free actions of human beings? Suffering due to earthquakes, disease, and the like? Is the existence of evil of *this sort* compatible with (1)? Here two lines of thought present themselves. On the one hand, it is conceivable that some natural evils and some persons are so related that the persons would have produced *less* moral good if the evils had been absent. Some people deal creatively with certain kinds of hardship or suffering, acting in such a way that on balance the whole state of affairs is valuable. And perhaps the response would have been less impressive and the total situation less valuable if the evil had not taken place. But a more traditional line of thought is indicated by St. Augustine (p. 26), who attributes much of the evil we find to *Satan* or to Satan and his cohorts. Satan, so the traditional doctrine goes, is a mighty nonhuman spirit who, along with many other angels, was created long before God created man. Unlike most of his colleagues, Satan rebelled against God and has since been wreaking whatever havoc he can. The result is natural evil. So the natural evil we find is due to free actions of nonhuman spirits.

Augustine is presenting what I earlier called a *theodicy*, as opposed to a *defense*. He believes that *in fact* natural evil (except for what can be attributed to God's punishment) is to be ascribed to the activity of beings that are free and rational but nonhuman. The Free Will Defender, of course, does not assert that this is *true;* he says only that it is *possible* [(and consistent with (1)]. He points to the possibility that natural evil is due to the actions of significantly free but nonhuman persons. We have noted that there is no inconsistency in the idea that God could not have created a world with a better balance of moral good over moral evil than this one displays. Something similar holds here; possibly natural evil is due to the free activity of nonhuman persons; and possibly it wasn't within God's power to create a set of such persons whose free actions produced a greater balance of good over evil. That is to say, it is possible that

> **(40) Natural evil is due to the free actions of nonhuman persons; there is a balance of good over evil with respect to the actions of these nonhuman persons; and it was not within the power of God to create a world that contains a more favorable balance of good over evil with respect to the actions of the nonhuman persons it contains.**

Again, it must be emphasized that (40) is not required to be *true* for the success of the Free Will Defense; it need only be compatible with (1). And it certainly looks as if it is. If (40) *is* true, furthermore, then *natural* evil significantly resembles *moral* evil in that, like the latter, it is the result of the activity of significantly free persons. In fact both moral and natural evil would then be special cases of what we might call *broadly moral evil*—evil resulting from the free actions of personal beings, whether human or not. Given this idea, we can combine (37) and (40) into one compendious statement:

> (41) **All the evil in Kronos is broadly moral evil, and it was not within the power of God to create a world containing a better balance of broadly moral good and evil.**

(41) appears to be consistent with (1) and

> (42) **God creates a world containing as much broadly moral good as Kronos contains.**

But (1), (41), and (42) together entail that there is as much evil as Kronos contains. So (1) is consistent with the proposition that there is as much evil as Kronos contains. I therefore conclude that the Free Will Defense successfully rebuts the charge of inconsistency brought against the theist.

11. Does the Existence of Evil Make It Unlikely That God Exists?

Not all atheologians who argue that one can't rationally accept the existence of both God and evil, maintain that there is *inconsistency* here. Another possibility is that the existence of evil, or of the amount of it we find (perhaps coupled with other things we know) makes it *unlikely* or *improbable* that God exists. And, of course, this could be true even if the existence of God is consistent with that of evil. In *Philosophical Problems and Arguments* James Cornman and Keith Lehrer concede that the amount of evil we find in the actual world is consistent with the existence of God; they argue, however, that the latter is unlikely or improbable, given the former. The essence of their contention is found in the following passage:

> If you were all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, and you were going to create a universe in which there were sentient beings—beings that are happy and sad; enjoy pleasure; feel pain; express love, anger, pity, hatred —what kind of world would you create? Being all-powerful, you would have the ability to create any world that it is logically possible for you to create, and being all-knowing you would know how to create any of these logically possible worlds. Which one would you choose? Obviously you would choose the best of all the possible worlds because you would be all-good and would want to do what is best in everything you do. You would, then, create the best of all the possible worlds, that is, that world containing the least amount of evil possible. And because one of the most obvious kinds of evil is suffering, hardship, and pain, you would create a world in which the sentient things suffered the least. Try to imagine what such a world would be like. Would it be like the one which actually does exist, this world we live in? Would you create a world such as this one if you had the power and knowhow to create any logically possible world? If your answer is "no," as it seems it must be, then you should begin to understand why the evil of suffering and pain in this world is such a problem for anyone who thinks God created this world; then, it seems we should conclude that it is improbable that it was created or sustained by anything we would call God. Thus, given this particular world, it seems we should conclude that it is improbable that God—who if he exists, created the world—exists. Consequently, the belief that God does not exist, rather than the belief that he exists, would seem to be justified by the evidence we find in this world.[24]

"Would you create a world such as this one," ask Cornman and Lehrer, "if you had the power and knowhow to create any logically possible world?" One premise of their argument, then, seems to be

> **(43) If God is omnipotent and omniscient, then He could have created any logically possible world.**

But further, ". . . you would choose the best of all the possible worlds because you would be all-good and would want to do what is best in everything you do." So another premise of their argument is

> **(44) If God is all-good, He would choose to create the best world He could.**

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[24] James Cornman and Keith Lehrer, *Philosophical Problems and Arguments* (New York Macmillan Co , 1969), pp. 340–349

From (43) and (44) they apparently conclude

> **(45) If God is omniscient, omnipotent, and all-good, He would have created the best of all possible worlds.**

But, they add,

> **(46) It is unlikely or improbable that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds.**

And from (45) and (46) it follows that it is unlikely or improbable that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good God.

The first premise of this argument is another statement of Leibniz' Lapse; and we have already seen that the latter is false. It isn't true that God, if omnipotent, could have actualized just any possible world. The inference of (45) from (43) and (44), furthermore, seems to presuppose that there *is* such a thing as the best of all possible worlds; and we have already seen that this supposition is suspect. Just as there is no greatest prime number, so perhaps there is no best of all possible worlds. Perhaps for any world you mention, replete with dancing girls and deliriously happy sentient creatures, there is an even better world, containing even more dancing girls and deliriously happy sentient creatures. If so, it seems reasonable to think that the second possible world is better than the first. But then it follows that for any possible world *W* there is a better world *W'* , in which case there just isn't any such thing as the best of all possible worlds.

So this argument is not at all satisfactory. How, indeed, *could* one argue, from the existence of evil, that it is unlikely that God exists? I certainly don't see how to do it. As a matter of fact I think I see how to argue that the amount and variety of the evil we find does *not* make the existence of God improbable. Take another look at

> **(41) All the evil in Kronos is broadly moral evil; and of all the worlds God could have created, none contains a better balance of broadly moral good with respect to broadly moral evil.**

Now I don't know of any evidence against (41). Of course, it involves the idea that the evil which isn't due to free *human* agency, is due to the free agency of *other* rational and significantly free creatures. Many people find this idea preposterous, but that is scarcely evidence against it. Some theologians tell us that this idea is repugnant to “man come of age” or to “modern habits of thought.” Again, this may be so (although it certainly isn’t repugnant to *everyone* nowadays), but it doesn’t come to much as evidence. The mere fact that a belief is unpopular at present (or at some other time) is interesting from a sociological point of view but evidentially irrelevant. “We have every reason to think”, say Cornman and Lehrer, “that all natural evils have perfectly natural causes. It is therefore unreasonable to postulate some nonnatural cause to explain their occurrences.” But, of course, here we’re not *postulating* the existence of nonhuman free agents to *explain* natural evil, we’re simply asking if we have evidence against (41). Perhaps, given our evidence, it would be irrational to postulate the existence of such beings, it does not follow that we have evidence *against* their existence. According to Cornman and Lehrer, we have every reason to suppose that natural evil has perfectly natural causes—where, no doubt, Satan and his minions would definitely not count as natural causes. But this is relevant only if their having natural causes precludes their *also* having nonnatural causes. What Cornman and Lehrer must mean, then, is that we have every reason to believe that these evils are *not* to be ascribed to the free activity of nonhuman rational beings. I don’t know of any such reason and doubt very much that Cornman and Lehrer do either. At any rate they haven’t suggested any. Perhaps they mean only that we have no reason to think that evil *is* caused by such beings. Perhaps so, but again this gives us no evidence for the proposition that it isn’t so caused.

I therefore do not believe that we have evidence against (41). In particular, the existence of evil—of the amount and variety of evil we actually find—is not evidence against it. We can make this more exact as follows. Suppose we say that a proposition *p confirms* a proposition *q* if *q* is more probable than not on *p* alone if, that is, *q* would be more probable than not-*q* with respect to what we know, if *p* were the only thing we knew that was relevant to *q*. And let’s say that *p disconfirms* *q* if *p* confirms the denial of *q*. And, just to facilitate discussion, let's agree that there are 10^{18} turps of evil; the total amount of evil (past, present, and future) contained by Kronos amounts to 10^{18} turps. I think it is evident that

(47) **There are 10^{18} turps of evil**

does not disconfirm (41). Nor does (47) disconfirm

(48) **God is omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect; God has created the world; all the evil in the world is broadly moral evil; and there is no possible world God could have created that contains a better balance of broadly moral good with respect to broadly moral evil.**

Now if a proposition *p* confirms a proposition *q*, then it confirms every proposition *q* entails. But then it follows that if *p disconfirms q*, *p* disconfirms every proposition that entails *q*. (47) does not disconfirm (48); (48) entails (1); so the existence of the amount and variety of evil actually displayed in the world does not render improbable the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good God. So far as this argument goes, there may be *other* things we know such that the existence of God is improbable with respect to *them*. Although I can't think of any such things, this argument doesn't show that there aren't any. But it does show that the existence of evil—specifically the amount Kronos contains—does not disconfirm God's existence.

The upshot, I believe, is that there is no good atheological argument from evil. The existence of God is neither precluded nor rendered improbable by the existence of evil. Of course, suffering and misfortune may nonetheless constitute a *problem* for the theist; but the problem is not that his beliefs are logically or probabilistically incompatible. The theist may find a *religious* problem in evil; in the presence of his own suffering or that of someone near to him he may find it difficult to maintain what he takes to be the proper attitude towards God. Faced with great personal suffering or misfortune, he may be tempted to rebel against God, to shake his fist in God's face, or even to give up belief in God altogether. But this is a problem of a different dimension. Such a problem calls, not for philosophical enlightenment, but for pastoral care. The Free Will Defense, however, shows that the existence of God is compatible, both logically and probabilistically, with the existence of evil; thus it solves the main philosophical problem of evil.